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"AND WHAT WAS YOUR MOTIVE FOR COMPLICITY IN THIS CRIME?" ASKED THE LAWYER.

THE MASTER OF DRUNGADHEN.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

A hot, breathless night in July, with the thermometer at 180 in the gas, as with scarce strength left to support their weary limbs, the night-workers still plodded on; the click, click of the type the only sound heard throughout the room; but as the chimes ceased, and Big Ben struck one, there was a temporary rest for slight refreshment, and a flow of chaff made them for the moment forget their fatigue, as some would catch a few minutes' sleep, and others would descend to the street door to let the night air play on their heated heads.

Among the latter was one, a young fellow of not more than twenty-four, called by his pals "Gentleman George," owing to his superior

style, both in dress and manners, which, although he was as free with his companions as the rest, appeared to stamp him as of a different mould.

He was tall and well proportioned, whilst the shirt-sleeve rolled above his elbow displayed an arm the skin of which was fair and delicate as that of a woman. His eyes were of a soft hazel, and his hair, which was dark brown, would cluster in natural curls over his head, partially shading his high, smooth forehead. Over his upper lip hung a tawny moustache, beneath which, when he smiled, a row of white, even teeth were visible, thus giving an unusual charm to his whole countenance.

"Fine weather for the crops!" said one they called Harris, as he looked up at the sky, in which the stars were already beginning to pale.

"Blow the crops," said another, who, lifting his apron, wiped his face, from which the perspiration was flowing freely.

"Well, blow the crops," retorted the other, laughing; "but you needn't be so precious disagreeable, Hobbs. The season will soon be over,

when you know, old'un, there'll be no work to do—there'll be no work to do-o-heo,—and then you can live the life of a gentleman on—"

But Hobbs did not stay to hear the last of his remarks, as, with a gesture of impatience at the hilarity of the other, he ascended the stairs, soon followed by Harris, leaving "Gentleman George," or, rather, Arthur Bland, still by the door.

"House still sitting!" soliloquised the latter, as, moving to the other side of the street, he saw the light still burning in the clock tower.

With the exception of the policeman on the beat scarcely a soul was to be seen, a stillness as of death resting on Abbey and Tower, and falling on the soft green grass, bathed in the light of the waning moon.

The quarter now striking, he was about to enter the door he had regained, as a form approached to where he stood, and a girl's hand was gently laid on his arm.

"Good heavens, Eddy!" he exclaimed, as he turned at her touch and shook hands with her "here, and at this time!"

"Yes, darling!" she replied, "you are not cross, are you? But I could not sleep, it was so hot, and I knew you generally came to the door about this time; so, when the house was quite quiet, I slipped out. I have been waiting a long time, until the others went away, and you were alone. And look what I have brought you!" she continued, as she opened a tiny wicker basket, within which a dozen fine strawberries were laid on some cool green leaves.

"You are a dear, good little girl!" he said, as he drew her towards him and kissed her full red lips; "but you must never do this again. I would not for the world have you in the streets alone at this hour; and how will you manage to get in when you return home?"

"Ready for every difficulty," she replied, with a smile, as she held up a latchkey. "Mamma left it on the table with the most convenient thoughtlessness; but do you think you will be on to-morrow night as well?"

"Can't say, my pet," he answered, "but I hope not. Oh! Eddy, don't you think me very selfish! But I want to tell you—to think well before—as I would rather break my heart than make you unhappy."

"How can you make me unhappy?" asked the girl, as she raised her large blue eyes to his.

"Why, darling," he continued, "you who have been brought up with every comfort, if not luxury, you who have never known what it is to pinch and slave; how could you bear the privations which at times creep into the home of a carpenter's wife? And then, dearest, when hard work and little rest makes one irritable, could you bear with me then? Remember, little one," he continued, "your friends would turn their backs on you; you would not, maybe, fraternise with mine, and as time passed on, would perhaps tire of me."

The blue eyes became suffused with tears, as, lifting them to the face of her lover, Edna Howard rested her head on his shoulder.

"Arthur," she said, "if that is the extent of my love, have nothing more to do with me. I could go through every ill for your sake—could face poverty if I only felt rich in your love; but if you doubt me, then we had better part."

"Oh! Eddy, my own, my darling!" he replied, as pressing her to his bosom, and imprinting passionate kisses on her lips, he told how he loved her, how his whole life was wrapped up in hers, as the chimes broke out on the still, night air.

"Good-night, darling!" he said, "I must go now," and he was turning to leave her when the little basket she still held made her remember the strawberries.

"Won't you have them, then?" she said, as she upraised the lid.

"Yes, dear," he replied, "make haste," and as she emptied them into his apron he ascended the stairs with hasty strides, as Edna once more emerged into the street.

"Oh, dear," she said to herself, "how I wish I was one-and-twenty now. I had half a mind to let it out to-night. But, no, it won't be long to wait, and it is for myself alone that he shall love me, not for what I have," and congratulating herself on her reticence and womanly wisdom, she soon reached Chester-place, which she re-entered as noiselessly as she had left it a short time before; but slight as was the sound of the closing door it was sufficient to arouse the vigilance of a large Newfoundland, sleeping on the mat near the same, who expressed his astonishment at his mistress's nocturnal entry by a series of barks which aroused the old housekeeper who slept in the lower apartments.

"Hush! Davis, not a word," said the girl, as she told her not to be alarmed; "it was so hot I could not sleep."

"Could not sleep, Miss Howard?" the other replied in astonishment; "then why not have taken a stroll in the garden?" and the frills of her ancient nightgown appeared to stiffen with indignation at what she considered her young lady's indiscretion, whilst Nero put his nose into the hand of the latter, as if to crave forgiveness for having inadvertently betrayed her actions.

"Oh, yes, and be shot at for cats by Maurice Melvor next door, who, in his zeal to exterminate

the race, fires at every movement in a bush or tree after sunset," replied Edna, who passed by to ascend to her little room, leaving the basket she had been carrying on the hall table.

The last action was not lost on Davis, who, as she heard the latter gently close her door, took up the same.

"There is something more than meets the eye here," she soliloquised. "What has this been carried for, and what does it all mean?" she inwardly exclaimed, as, opening the same, her eyes fell on the fresh green leaves on which the strawberries had so lately rested, one of which had remained behind when she emptied them into Arthur's apron. "Well, I shall make it my duty to inform Lady Howard, that she may consider whether it is right for a young girl of twenty to be perambulating the streets at two o'clock in the morning or no; but, bless ye, she weren't alone—not she," and as Davis's thoughts evidently reverted to a something in the past, and recalled to her memory the time when she had seen but twenty years of life, the rigid lines on her face softened, and even the frill of her cap became limp as it fell over her wrinkled brow, when she again entered her sleeping apartment.

Edna was well aware that her mother would be informed of her midnight sortie—a fact which caused her but little anxiety, as laying her golden head on the snow-white pillow she soon fell asleep.

But her dreams were unquiet and disturbed; some unseen power ever dividing her from Arthur, whose handsome face would become distorted whenever his gaze fell on her, until awaking with a scream she found the sun pouring his rays into the room, although the household was still unaroused.

So with a yawn and a turn she once more courted the god of sleep, as Arthur Bland bent his weary steps homeward.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. BLAND was preparing breakfast as her son entered by the area door of No.—, Lupus-street, and a fragrant smell of ham-and-eggs fell on his senses as he peered into the kitchen.

She was a little round woman, with a pleasant fat face. Life to her was a path she had to traverse, and the troubles she met were as so many rough stones, which she kicked out of her way, and to which she gave no further thought as she proceeded on her journey. Her age was about fifty—a fact she never denied, although few would have taken her to be so old, she having all the activity and fun of youth, but, as she would tell folks, grizzling did more towards wrinkles and grey hair than a hundred years rolled into one, and to take the rough with the smooth was her motto.

The different rooms in No.— were let out to as many different lodgers, with the exception of the kitchen, breakfast-room adjoining, and two bedrooms at the top which were reserved for herself and son. And a lively time the latter had of it when he came home tired and worn out, hoping to get a few hours' rest, when unfortunately all the other inmates were astir, and an embryo pianist in the first floor, a violinist in the second, and a baby in the back-room of the same kept up a continual concert of sound united to entire absence of harmony.

Mrs. Bland was a widow, Mr. Bland having become so far a thing of the past that it was impossible to bring Mr. B. to recall any recollection of the dear departed; and she would, if Arthur asked any question respecting his father, shut him up so completely that he let the subject rest.

Sometimes the memory of the latter would go back to his early years, in which a dim recollection of different surroundings were faintly portrayed. But his mother told him he never had another home, and thus banished any hope that he might have cherished that they had once been in a different position.

"Come on, lad," said Mrs. Bland, as she took up the last egg, and placed it with its tempting

surrounding of snowy-flakiness on the saucer she had just cooked, and put the dish on the table. "Why, you look worn out! Sit down, and make a good breakfast, the coffee will refresh you; and I have put a dark blind up in your room, so that you will be able to have a good sleep after."

"I have no appetite, mother," said Arthur, as he threw himself on a chair and stroked the cat, which had jumped on his knees as soon as he was seated.

"Oh! nonsense," said the former, "you just take a mouthful of that, and I'll wager you won't leave much of it not eaten."

But Arthur merely sipped the coffee and tasted a few mouthfuls of the other, when saying he was dead-beat he arose to ascend to his room.

For some time he lay tossing about, a confusion of thoughts and ideas filling his brain as his mind reverted to Eddy and the obstacle of birth and position, not to name the want of money, which raised a barrier between him and his happiness, and fears, which she never named or thought of, were ever present with him.

The heat was intense, and notwithstanding that every means was taken by Mrs. Bland for their destruction, the flies were most persistent in doing their best to destroy whatever chance Arthur had of obtaining a peaceful slumber. It was too hot for exercise of any description, and even the piano and violin were mute, until at last fatigues conquering all else he closed his weary eyes and soon became unconscious to the buzz of his tormentors, as they, with the greatest pertinacity, still took up their position on his nose, and settled on his soft brown curls; and when Mrs. Bland, two hours later, entered his room he was still sleeping.

She very quietly closed the door behind her; when after placing the basin of beef-tea she had brought up on the table she stood watching the sleeper. To know what was passing through her mind was impossible; but a seriousness uncommon to her nature seemed to contract her brows, as there she stood gazing on him, when as her eyes fell on a birth-mark which was visible on his bare bosom, she gently drew the shirt over it, and with a deep drawn sigh was about to turn from the bed, when, the baby below setting up a terrific yell, Arthur awoke.

"What, you here, mother?" he said, as he turned.

"Yes, dear," she replied; "look, I've brought ye some nice beef-tea; will ye try and sup a little?"

"Yes, mother, I think I will," said Arthur, as raising himself on his elbow he took the basin from her.

The daily paper which the latter had brought in with him in the morning still lay on the bed, where it had fallen from his grasp as he fell asleep, and whilst he supped his soup Mrs. Bland glanced over the news.

The baby, mad at having been quiet so long, continued to scream, as though he meant to spend the remainder of the day in that pleasing pastime, till Mrs. Bland's passion being exhausted, she was just in the act of expressing a wish that he was at Jericho, or any other such distance from Lupus-street, when her eyes falling on a certain paragraph she uttered an exclamation, and started from the seat she had taken on the bedside, as though a pin's point uppermost had accidentally been left in the coverlid.

"What on earth is the matter, mother?" asked Arthur; "anyone would think you were shot."

"Oh! nothing, leastways nothing which concerns you," she answered, as she took the empty basin from his hand, "so now turn over and go to sleep, and I will bring you your dinner at three o'clock. You don't want this!" and capturing the paper she left the room.

"I have made up my mind anyhow," said the woman to herself, as descending the stairs she knocked at the door of the room where baby was still employed in the exercise of his lungs, and looking up at the little rebel, as his mother opened the door, one would have thought her mind had been made up to exterminate him on the spot. But the remark had no allusion whatever to that tiny individual, who put out his

arms to go to her, and nestled fondly to her bosom, quiet and subdued, as she took him into the kitchen, where he could cry to his heart's content without disturbing the sleeper upstairs.

After setting him down at her feet with some toys she always kept in reserve Mrs. Bland again fixed her eyes on the paragraph which had given such a shock to her nervous system, which, after reading again and again, she cut carefully out, placing the same in her purse, as she let the remainder of the paper fall on the floor for the amusement her infant visitor took in tearing the same to pieces.

And years after Mrs. Bland would always say she could not make out how she managed to cook the dinner on that day, her mind so fully occupied with other thoughts; but the meal was prepared and cleared away with no assistance but that rendered by a girl of fourteen, who used to help generally in the domestic arrangements.

"There, take him to his mother now," she said to the latter, referring to the baby; as Arthur entered the room she began to pour out some tea, that he might have a cup before going to work.

"Are you going out anywhere, mother?" asked the latter, as to his astonishment Mrs. Bland had put on her best dress since bringing him up his dinner. "What the dickens is up?"

"Nothing particular," remarked the other. "But I have to go out on a little business, that's all," and, as if to prevent him referring further to the subject, she commenced asking a list of questions, which took her son all his time to answer before it was time to start for the office.

"I shall not be long, Maria," she said to the little servant, as, two hours after, she left the house and proceeded to Chester-place.

CHAPTER III.

A YOUNG girl was about to leave the house as she ascended the steps, and Mrs. Bland started as she gazed on the fair face, with its halo of golden hair, as, with the handle of the door still in her grasp, Eddy asked who she wanted.

"Please, miss, is Lady Howard in?" Mrs. Bland inquired, and on the girl replying in the affirmative, and bidding her come in, she entered the spacious hall.

"Down, Nero, down!" said his young mistress, as the dog began to express signs of dissatisfaction when Mrs. Bland's footsteps sounded on the tessellated floor. "He won't hurt you," she added; and leading the way up the stairs to the drawing-room she opened the door of the same.

"Mamma, here is some one wants particularly to see you," she said, as she told Mrs. Bland to enter the room.

Lady Howard was seated by the open window. Languidly raising her head at the sound of her daughter's voice she seemed surprised to see the latter in her walking attire, and without taking any heed of her companion, who stood in the shadow.

"Are you going out, Edna?" she asked.

"Only a little way, mamma, dear," the girl replied, as her mother's look was sufficient to show her it would not be well to repeat the little escapade of the previous evening.

Lady Howard was a fine woman. She had passed the meridian of life, but her face still bore traces of the splendid beauty of her youth.

She was extremely fair, and even now the colour would mount to her cheeks and glow beneath the soft skin as brilliantly as it did twenty years ago, when any sudden emotion aroused her.

For the moment she did not notice that Mrs. Bland's eyes were fixed on her faded though still beautiful face, as telling Edna not to be long she bid her close the door behind her, when, rising from the seat she had occupied by the window, she approached to the middle of the room; her lovely figure showing to advantage in the rich surroundings.

"What is it you want with me?" she asked, addressing the former.

"To appeal to your honour, if you have any left, Lady Howard," replied the woman, who now advanced further into the room that the light might fall more fully on her form.

"Martha!" exclaimed the other.

"Yes, it is Martha," replied the latter, as, without invitation, she took a chair and seated herself by the table.

Lady Howard, from whose face all trace of colour had fled, looked steadily at the woman as she dropped into a seat opposite her visitor.

"What is it you want?" she asked.

"First of all to show you this, if you have not seen it already," and Mrs. Bland took from her purse the paragraph she had cut from the paper early in the day, and handed it to her companion, whilst she noted the effect the same had on her.

"Dead!" she exclaimed; "dead!" and an expression of pain passed over her beautiful countenance, as resting her head on her hand she for the moment appeared to forget that she was not alone, but the rustle of Mrs. Bland's dress aroused her to a sense of her situation.

"And what is it you would have me do?" she asked.

"Florence Howard," replied the other, as she fixed her eyes on the face of her companion, "does not your own conscience tell you what you ought to do! Twenty long years have I kept your secret. I refuse to do so longer."

"Forty years would never turn me from my purpose. Until she lies cold and dead as he is now I will never open my lips. She shall die as she has lived—childless, and the broad lands of Drungaden shall go to the man she hates. You say twenty years you have kept my secret! Yes, true, twenty years since, and yet it seems but yesterday."

Her head still drooped on her white, transparent hand, whilst she appeared lost in thought and entirely oblivious of her companion's presence, until Mrs. Bland, desirous of making that presence known, gave a little short cough, adding (as she saw it had the desired effect),—

"And don't you think, now, twenty years is sufficient to keep it up!—and surely it is long enough to forget a quarrel in!"

"Have you had any reason to complain?" asked her companion.

"Oh! no, my lady," replied the other, "you have allus behaved like a lady to me, but that isn't all. I have such a thing as a conscience, and conscience is for ever a dinning into my ears: 'You know you ain't acting right, Martha, and you are as bad as she is,' and that's what made me come to you, when I found that there," and she pointed to the piece of paper which still lay on the rosewood table. "Thinks I, this is a good opportunity; but you consider the matter, my lady, and I promise you to do nothing until I hear from you," and Mrs. Bland, rising from her seat, made a movement towards the door.

"Let it rest so then, for a short time, Martha," replied her ladyship, as she held out her hand. "I will write to you in a few days, you hear that," she continued, as moving towards the window they listened to some street music, "Wait till the clouds roll by." "Yes, Martha, every cloud has a silver lining," and she once more bid the woman adieu, as a neat little maid-servant entered the room.

"Shall I light the gas, my lady?" asked the latter, as, after having shown Mrs. Bland out, she once more ascended to the room; but my lady had stepped on to the balcony, drawing comfort from the sweet perfume of flowers surrounding her, and the soft summer breeze which cooled her heated temples; and as she stood there dreaming of the past, going back in memory to the long ago, when fond words had been whispered in her ear, on such a night as this, with no other witness of her happiness than the bright stars glittering in the heavens, and the leaves as they rustled in the branches above her head, her attention was drawn to two figures which moved slowly forward in the deepening gloom—a youth and a girl. For a moment Lady Howard forgot that which had so lately engrossed her thoughts, as her eyes took in the scene before her—his with his arm encircling her, they wait, looking down on the fair face uplifted to his own, a face, which even in the growing shadows, she could see lighten with the light of love, as his soft words were whispered too low for aught but her to hear.

"Edna!" she exclaimed, "and at this hour! Surely I am mistaken!" But a few moments confirmed the truth, which she almost doubted, as a short time later the former entered the room whilst Arthur Bland remained in the shadow, until he had heard the door shut behind her, when he again bent his steps homeward.

Mrs. Bland was at home on his return, but the stiff silk dress was taken off and her afternoon stuff one put on in its place. She was preparing the supper table as he entered, and did not at first notice that he had come in.

"Lor, how you did frighten me, Arthur!" she said, as with a start she turned at the sound of her name; "so you ain't on to-night!"

No, thank goodness," replied Arthur; "but I say, mother, I thought you said you were going out!"

"Well, and hain't I had plenty of time to go out and come back!" returned his mother, as she stripped off the outer leaves of a lettuce she was getting ready for salad, whilst the little termagant of the second floor back sat on the floor complacently sucking a piece of the root of the same, which he evidently seemed to relish.

Arthur wondered what had put his mother out; but knowing from experience it was better when she was in a bad humour to take no notice he quietly took a seat close by the baby, at whom he commenced snapping his fingers, as a way, he thought, of making him laugh, but unfortunately it had the contrary effect; for, instantly dropping the lettuce root, he set up a terrific yell, causing Mrs. Bland in her fright to cut her finger, as she hastily turned to see what was the matter.

"What are you doing to the child?" she asked, as lifting him from the floor she endeavoured to soothe his cries, the blood from her finger staining the white diaper of his pinafore; but all in vain. Whilst Mrs. Bland held him in her arms it was all right, but the moment she put him down and his eyes fell on Arthur he commenced again, until the latter, losing all patience, told his mother to take him upstairs, or he'd go out without any supper.

"Oh, dear, dear!" replied the latter, as she took up the infant, who appeared determined to scream louder than ever, in spite to Arthur for having been the cause of his banishment.

"It ain't all honey keeping a lodging place," she said, as the cries of the child became deafened by the five-fingered exercise in the first floor, and "Home, Sweet Home," scraped on the violin in the one above, that the little woman was almost beside herself when she deposited her charge in his mother's arms.

On her return to the kitchen Arthur lifted his eyes from the paper which he had been reading, as if in doubt whether it would be wiser to enter into conversation, or remain silent until his mother's face had resumed its usual serenity; but the first glance giving him no encouragement, he took the latter course, and continued reading the paper until she, having finished her preparations, told him supper was ready.

The meal was a silent one, and Arthur was not sorry that such was the case, as it gave him time for reflection; and although he was anxious to learn the reason of Mrs. Bland's visit to Chester-place, as he felt sure from Edna's description that she was the little woman who had asked for Lady Howard, still he lacked the courage to commence the subject.

"Surely," he thought, "she had not in any way discovered their secret and considered it her duty to inform her ladyship, before first of all speaking to him. Oh! no. His mother was too frank and open-hearted for that; but what else could be the purport of her visit to that lady's residence?" And as these thoughts passed through his mind he felt he could not rest until he had learnt the truth, when a single knock at the door, and a voice which he could not mistake, sent his ideas in a different direction.

"That's Mary again for a thousand!" he exclaimed, as Mrs. Bland rose from the table.

"Never!" exclaimed the latter; "why she hasn't been in her place not a fortnight this time."

Mary was a housemaid, who, whenever she was out of place, which was invariably twice a

month, lodged with Mrs. Bland, until obtaining, as she expressed it, "a fresh crib." She was very little, remarkably neat, and with an appearance which, she declared, would take her anywhere, which, undoubtedly, nine cases out of ten it did; but unfortunately the balance of bad temper and sauciness so outweighed the former that whenever she went into a situation the odds were in favour of her being turned out the same night, until Arthur jokingly told his mother, "she was an annuity to her, and whilst she lived there was no fear of having that little room at the top of the house empty."

The latter was not mistaken.

"Another wretched crib!" he heard her say, as Mrs. Bland opened the door, and they deposited the boxes, which, had it not been for their neat coverings, would have suffered sadly from their constant travelling, and the bumps they received on being continually transferred from cab to house and house to cab.

"What is the matter now, Mary?" asked Arthur, as she descended to the kitchen. "Out again!"

"Yes," replied Mary, with a silvery laugh, which ill-belled her real disposition; "who do ye think could stand her cheek!"

"Whose cheek?" asked Arthur, at a loss to understand her meaning.

"Why, the missus's, to be sure," replied the girl; "the old rat. She flew at me like a pick-pocket," she continued (swaying from side to side like the pendulum of a clock, a way Mary always had when excited, which she seldom was not), "and I turns round and cheeks her."

"But what was it all about?" asked Mrs. Bland; "why, I thought you were getting on so comfortable like, not having heard of you for a fortnight."

"A fortnight!" laughed Mary, swaying faster than ever. "Lor' bless ye, I haven't been there a fortnight!"

"Not a fortnight!" exclaimed mother and son together; "why, where have you been?"

"Well, you know I told ye when I went it wasn't the place I wanted; but I was obliged to take something; and when I got there there was an old cook, and directly I saw her I said to myself, 'you'll never agree with her, I know,' but you know you are always in the wrong, so don't you begin"—Mary had a habit of speaking of herself as though she was another person—"and I keep quiet, but when I goes in the morning for the hot water for my bedrooms, be bless if the old cat hadn't turned the kettle right off the fire, and of course, to make a long story short, we had a row, and I had to go."

"Without your wages, Mary?" asked Arthur.

"What do you think?" replied Mary, swaying more furiously than ever. "Oh, no; they had to pay my month's wages, of course, and I got another crib the same day."

"Without a character?" said Mrs. Bland.

"Well, the missus told the lady all about it. She said I was honest, upright, and respectable; leastways, that was the character she had with me, and as usual, of course she was delighted with my appearance, and I went in the same night."

"And what made you leave this last place?" asked Arthur.

"Well, it wasn't my fault; I should have stayed if I could, although there were too many servants for me, in the first instance, as you know I only like to go where there is cook and housemaid. However, you must know the missus was a widow lady; there was only her and a young lady, her step-daughter; then there was an old housekeeper, the parlour-maid, cook and me. Well, last night there was an awful scene. Miss Edna, it seems, has been keeping company with some young man without her ma's knowing of it, and last night she found it out."

"Oh! Arthur, my life; just see what you have done!" exclaimed Mrs. Bland, as her son upset the jug of ale over the clean cloth.

"Never mind about the cloth," says Arthur. "Well, and how did it all end, Mary?"

"Oh! of course, missus says I should ha' told her, as she was quite sure I knew; and I ups and says to her face it wasn't true, and as usual got turned out there and then."

"But about the young lady, I mean!" says Arthur, anxiously.

"You are mighty anxious about the young lady," laughed Mary. "Oh, she's all right; she checked her ma, and tells her she was not her ma at all, and she wouldn't give up her young man for anyone. But come on, and give us a jug to get a drop of ale afore I take my things off," and Mary ran up the stairs, leaving Mrs. Bland and her son to finish their supper, the former giving directions to their small atom of servitude to carry the lighter boxes to the top room, leaving the larger ones for Arthur later on.

CHAPTER IV.

To write to Arthur and tell him how her mother had been a witness of their last parting was the first thought of Edna after the stormy interview she had had with the former, in which, according to Mary's version, she had checked the same, and the latter young lady had had her dismissal.

She had refused to tell either the name or occupation of her lover, knowing full well such an avowal would have been considered by Lady Howard as an insult to the memory of her dead father, whose pride would never have sanctioned such a union, whilst the very difference in their station, in her eyes, added greatly to the romance of her situation, at the same time, that she truly loved the young composer with all the freshness of a first affection; whilst after a restless night, in which he fancied Eddy was being drawn from him by an irresistible force, Arthur awoke to a sense of his true position.

How could he—a man working for his weekly wage—take her—dearly, fondly as he loved the baronet's daughter—from a home of luxury to one which at the best could not provide a tithe of the comforts which to her were as necessities from her earliest childhood!

But as he read the letter which awaited him at the office, the good resolutions he had formed in the still night hours vanished—all thoughts of the future were scattered to the winds, as he basked in the sunshine of his present happiness; and the buoyancy of his spirits during the remainder of the day did not pass unnoticed by his companions.

Besides, it was his birthday, and, as was the custom, such an event as a birthday could not be allowed to pass without the customary whisky and biscuits, with which the honours of the same were celebrated.

"Long life and prosperity to Gentlemen George," said the one they called Harris, as he tipped off the neat spirit from a cracked and earless mug.

"Yeah, Sheorge," says another, who had evidently been celebrating someone else's birthday; "ere's good 'ealth, my boy—" when a sudden lurch not only ended his speech, but the cracked cup, which came to grief as he fell on the floor, where he was allowed to remain to sleep till late in the day, when he was aroused to find each man at his case, and the click, click of the type told him work was resumed.

And Arthur seemed to have derived fresh strength as he toiled on—on, until once more the chimes of the later hours resounded from the belfry tower, telling of the bright summer night passing away.

"Did you get my letter, dear?" asked Edna, as Gentleman George, according to appointment, ran down to meet her at the door.

"Yes, my darling," was the reply, as in the shadow of the doorway he pressed her to his bosom and imprinted a kiss on her fair forehead.

"But, Eddy dear, don't you think you were wrong to leave home, and cause such anxiety as your mother will naturally feel at your absence?"

"She is not my mother," said the girl, "and has no right to control my actions."

"Hush!" replied Arthur; "think, darling. She was your father's wife, and would he have had you act so? You cannot suppose, Eddy, I speak but for your good. Had I money I would ask you to place your fate in my hands—to be

my darling wife, and we would together meet the troubles which inevitably creep into the working man's home. But I love you too much to insure my own happiness at the loss of yours."

"No, you don't love me," sobbed Eddy. "I'll go back to mamma, and never see you again," she cried, passionately, as she endeavoured to disengage herself from his embrace.

"Eddy!"

And, as the pained look in his soft hazel eyes met hers, the first stroke of eleven solemnly breaking on the still night air, begging him to forgive her, she told him the address of the old nurse to whom she had fled when Lady Howard upbraided her on the previous evening.

"And you will not repent? You think the step you are about to take, my pet, that you will be my darling wife," he was saying, when a hearse turning the corner slowly passed where they were standing.

"What is it?" said Eddy, a few people following the same arousing her surprise at that hour.

"Oh," replied Arthur, "it is the body of Lord D'Armaise, which is to be conveyed by the midnight train from Victoria for interment at his country seat."

"Who is he?" asked Edna.

"Why, the nobleman who fell down dead whilst listening to the debate in the House the other night," Arthur replied.

"I didn't know anything about it," said Eddy, as she watched the hearse out of sight.

"It shows you don't read the papers much," laughed Arthur. "He complained of faintness, but died before assistance could be obtained. The body was moved to 'The Grand,' and Lady D'Almaise telegraphed for, and by her wish it was to be conveyed late and quietly to Drungadhen. But there goes the quarter. I must be off—one more kiss and away."

To Arthur how slowly the remainder of the night passed—his thoughts so engrossed with Eddy that he made countless mistakes, and never did the hours appear to lag as they did then, until the time came when, throwing off his apron, he hurried homewards.

In doing so he had to pass the street where Eddy had taken refuge with her nurse, and he almost wished the little head, which he knew would be at the window, was not there to see him worn, faded, and dirty as he passed.

Mary was in the kitchen on his return, where Mrs. Bland was engaged in her culinary duties, whilst the big maid of fourteen was vigorously endeavouring to bring a polish on a boot in which her hand was lost, and her arm had disappeared up to the elbow. The former was attired in walking costume, a white silk tie, fastened with a silver brooch, giving, as she considered, the finishing touch to the scrupulous cleanliness of her whole dress.

"Out already, Mary!" said Arthur, as he returned the morning greeting.

"Rather! what do you think!" replied that young lady (Mary always appealed to the thoughts of any one who questioned her). "I'm off with my advertisement to the newspaper office, and if they don't have it out to-morrow they'll know it, that's all;" and with that dreadful threat, which by the intonation of her words might have been supposed to involve the ruin of the paper, she swayed out of the house, leaving the little servant polishing away at the other boot in the back kitchen, whilst Mrs. Bland and her son took their breakfast in the front.

"Did you read, mother, about the nobleman who fell down dead in the House the other night?" asked Arthur. "His body was removed last night—it passed our place about eleven o'clock."

"It isn't often I read the papers," said Mrs. Bland, as she cut three immense hunches of bread-and-butter, and, pouring out a mugful of coffee, called to the girl when she had finished them boots to come for her breakfast. "But what about it! Isn't he to be buried here, then?"

"No," replied Arthur. "After the inquest his remains were removed quietly from 'The

Grand, and they are to be interred at Drungadhen on Thursday."

"I know! I know!" said Mrs. Bland, excitedly, "in Drungadhen churchyard, under the marble stone around which the roses bloom, and the sweet mignonette grows over the tomb of the D'Almaines, protected by the gilded rails which divide it from the common burial ground."

"Do you know Drungadhen, then, mother?" asked Arthur, surprised at the other's excitement.

"I know those who do," she replied, curtly; "but you get on with your breakfast, for you look dead beat. Come on, Maria, your coffee will be stone cold."

The last sentence was applied to the girl, who had just managed to disengage her arm from the last boot, and was nothing loth to avail herself of the fare her mistress had prepared for her, whilst Arthur once more ascended to his little room, where, notwithstanding piano, violin, and baby, he soon fell fast asleep—to dream of Eddy, but not as the wife of a poor comp, but as that of one in her own station of life.

CHAPTER V.

THE mossy grounds surrounding Drungadhen Castle were bathed in the bright sunlight of a hot July day, vainly striving to enter through the close drawn blinds where a lady sat, her head bowed on her breast in uncontrollable grief, as she gazed on the silent features of him with whom but a few days before she had parted in full health and strength, now cold and lifeless.

She was not young, but neither trouble nor age could remove, though they might modify, the beauty which would ever rest on the features of Adelaide D'Almaine whilst life lasted.

She was a brunette of the purest type, and through the clear olive skin the colour would wave to and fro at times, tingling her cheek with the hue of the carnation, whilst at others she would be pale and colourless, or, as envy would pronounce it, sallow.

She was devotedly attached to the man on whose dead face she now gazed, as tears of agony welled through the snowy fingers she pressed over her burning eyes.

For years her whole happiness had rested on him and him alone, a great sorrow in the weary past having deprived her of all else on which to fix her affection, as childless she lived on, surrounded by every luxury to make life happy, whilst that for which she prayed and hoped for was denied her; and as a vision of a sweet baby face—and she heard in her imagination the liping of a baby tongue—would at times come before her in her happiest moments, like gall it seemed to embitter the cup of bliss which otherwise it was hers to quaff. And now that death, regardless of all ties, had left her alone in the world, she only prayed that the grave which would open for him might close on both.

How long she had sat by the side of death she knew not, as unconscious of the passing moments—unheeding the reflection in that still chamber of the summertime without—her thoughts flew back to the years gone by, and in her fancy she again passed through all the joys and troubles of the days long fled, when suddenly she arose, and approaching a miniature cabinet of ebony inlaid with pearl, she unlocked the same, from its hidden recesses abstracting a packet in tissue paper, and unrolling the same, displayed a treasure on which she showered passionate kisses as she bathed it with her hot tears.

It was an infant's shoe of blue-quilted silk, soiled in parts where the tiny foot had crased it, which, although treasured as the richest gem, began to show signs of age, which even prized as it had been, could not defy the time which had passed since a loving hand had placed it there.

Taking it tenderly from the drawer in which it had lain so long, Lady D'Almaine returned to the coffin from which the dead face still seemed to wear for her the smile it had ever had in life, and placed her treasure on the still breast.

"Lie there," she said, as her tears fell on both,

"all that is left of the D'Almaines. Oh! Heaven, that I might lie there too," and, kneeling by the corpse of the fond husband—by the tiny relic of her baby son—Adelaide D'Almaine prayed not for life, but for the long, long sleep from which she hoped never to awaken.

But the weary days passed by, the sun shone bright, and the birds twittered gaily amid the branches as they swayed to and fro above the green sward of Drungadhen, as though neither trouble nor sorrow could ever enter within its castle walls. But it shone on the stream of black, and the birds sang their gay songs over the sable plumes, as, slowly and mournfully the last of the D'Almaines was borne to his last home, the last time (the villagers said) that the marble stone would be raised to receive one of the old family.

"Dust to dust, ashes to ashes," and the soil from the land which had been theirs from generation to generation fell o'er the last of their race. The will of the late Earl was read, in which falling leaves he bequeathed all to his wife, Lady Adelaide D'Almaine, wholly and absolutely. The same was disputed, and claimants put in their title to the broad lands of Drungadhen, but, failing the direct line, ultimately withdrew, leaving the widow in quiet possession.

Many weeks had passed since these events, and where the trees waved their leafy branches in the sunlight they were now bare, standing like spectres of the past, on the broad expanse of untrodden snow.

Lady D'Almaine had left the Castle, which but reminded her of her great loss, taking up her residence in London for the winter months. She lived almost the life of a recluse, caring little for society, her only companion a niece, on whom she now appeared to fix her whole affection.

Constance Aubrey was the daughter of her youngest and favourite brother, who, only surviving his wife but a short year, left Constance an orphan at an early age. She was now eighteen, a pretty fair-haired, bright creature, whose winning ways gained for her many a friend, whilst, in addition to her charms of face and person, they but too often invoked the jealousy of her sex.

"Now, auntie," she said, coaxingly, as she approached from the window of their hotel to where Lady D'Almaine was seated by a large fire, her feet resting on a velvet stool, which sank deep into the fleecy wool of the mat on which it stood, "you will go for a drive this lovely afternoon, won't you? It will do you so much good to go round the Park, and I should so much like to hear how that poor young woman is who was knocked down yesterday."

"My dear child," replied her aunt, "what are you talking about? You insisted yesterday on her being conveyed after the accident in the carriage with yourself to some dirty, out-of-the-way place, and now, maybe, you will want to give her a drive with me."

"No, auntie, dear," said Constance, "not quite so familiar as that; but she did seem so nice, and I feel sure she is a lady, notwithstanding it is not a very nice place where she lives, and I should like to know how she is, that's all. May I order the carriage?"

"As you will, my child," replied her ladyship, as Constance smothered her with kisses, and said she was the dearest auntie that ever lived; and so my lady's maid was soon enveloping her in costly furs, and following to the carriage door; warm and heavy rugs were wrapped round her ladyship's legs, so as to defy the biting cold of that January afternoon.

And Conny took every precaution for the comfort of her aunt, as with her own fair face all aglow with the life and joyousness of youth she chatted on, until the elder lady became quite lively beneath the influence of her buoyant spirits. They had been twice round the Park, had twice passed and repassed the same carriages, when, gaining permission from Lady D'Almaine, Constance gave directions for the coachman to drive to Elm-street, Piccadilly. It was a small street, and the houses, chiefly inhabited by respectable mechanics, were, although not pretentious, free from any signs denoting poverty. The balconies were decorated with evergreens, where

summer flowers had once bloomed, and snowy curtains draped the windows, inside which, belonging to the parlours, was placed a tiny table, on which a figure or shade of artificial flowers stood facing the street. A carriage stopping at one of these was an event which caused several heads to appear almost simultaneously at each house in the row, where a view of the magnificent horses, with their silver harness, and the carriage, on the panels of which was displayed the arms of the D'Almaines, was obtainable; whilst the horses in their turn appeared equally astonished at being drawn up in what they evidently considered and expressed by the toss of their proud heads as a questionable locality.

The loud and important rat-tat of the footman was answered by a big stout woman—from appearance the landlady—who, having answered the former's question, remained with the door open whilst he returned to the carriage, from which Constance and her aunt at once alighted.

The landlady preceded them up the stairs, which, although narrow, were carpeted and scrupulously clean, until knocking at the front room on the first floor she ushered them into the same.

This, like the rest of the house, was neatness itself; and although the furniture was of an inferior description, as well as scanty, still there was a refined taste displayed in the arrangement of the same which did not pass unnoticed by the visitors.

An old woman was busily engaged stirring something in a saucepan on the fire, whilst on a bed with snowy coverlet and spotless linen reclined a young one—almost a girl—beside whom, its tiny face alone visible, slept a two days-old babe.

"Oh, dear!" said Constance, as she drew her aunt's attention to the little stranger, "I had no idea of this," addressing the young mother; "I came to inquire how you were after the narrow escape you had the other day!"

"I was very, very frightened," replied the girl; "and thought nothing could have saved me; but it was so kind of you to bring me home when I fainted away, after having told the policeman where I lived, and before the morning my baby was born."

The reserve usually visible when conversing with a superior was entirely absent, as in a tone of equality she replied to the questions put by Lady D'Almaine and her niece, and a flush of pleasure dyed her fair face as she listened with a young mother's pride to the eulogiums passed on her infant son, who slept so unconscious of the praise passed on his personal appearance.

Saying they would come again in a few days they were about to leave as the handle of the door turned, and a young man entered the room.

"It is my husband," said the girl, addressing the ladies. "Arthur," she continued, "these are the kind friends in whose carriage I was brought home the day I was nearly run over."

Lady D'Almaine looked steadfastly at him, as he acknowledged their presence; and then, expressing his gratitude for the kindness they had shown his wife, he proceeded to escort them to their carriage, the door of which he had closed after them, when calling him back, the elder lady held out her card, saying,—

"Excuse me, but what is your name?"

"Arthur Bland," was the reply.

"And that is mine," she said, as he took the name, and the carriage drove off amid the surmises of the neighbours as to the reason of its going there.

CHAPTER VI.

"LADY D'ALMAINE!" said Arthur, as he looked at the card her ladyship had left, "how strange, and she seems quite to have taken to my little Eddy;" but the surprise of the latter was as great as his own, on hearing from her husband the name of her visitor, in honour of whom she confided to him, later on, she should name baby Arthur D'Almaine, and accordingly little Master Bland was thus baptised and christened.

Mrs. Bland, senior, saw little of Arthur since his marriage, and, as she had expressed herself

rather warmly respecting the step he had taken, he entered into no confidence regarding the same, and she remained in entire ignorance as to where he lived, as also the name of the girl he had made his wife.

Had she been aware of the step he had intended taking she would, before it was too late, have done all in her power to have prevented the union, which appeared to her a source of annoyance and trouble, whilst it was as great a puzzle to Arthur to understand why it should thus affect her.

Month after month passed by since she had paid that evening visit to Lady Howard, and as each went on, and no communication from the latter with reference to the purport of the same, she determined to take other steps for the attainment of her object; and taking the opportunity one morning, when little cooking was required by the inmates of No. —, arrayed herself in her best clothes, and asking Mary, who was again out of place, if she would mind the house until her return, sallied forth.

"Of course I will," said Mary; "but you won't be long, will you?—as I promised to go over to my sister's."

"I shan't be more than a couple of hours," replied Mrs. Bland, buttoning a pair of gloves two sizes too large for her, as she went towards the door.

"All right, good-bye, old gal," said Mary, feeling awfully inquisitive, but not liking to inquire into the "old gal's" business.

Mrs. Bland had to wait some time for a bus, and then, unfortunately commencing her journey in a wrong one, one of the specified hours had almost gone before she found herself in the office of Simpkin and Brothers, solicitors, Lincoln's-inn-fields, and a good twenty minutes of the other passed in the clerks' office, where she thought time never passed so slow before, as sitting there facing a wooden partition, not very high, behind which two or three young men, seated on high stools, scratched away with their pens on large sheets of paper—the only sound which broke the stillness of the room. The little woman read and reread the different property mentioned on large bills, which would be sold by auction by Simpkin and Brothers on such-and-such a day, varying her study by perusing large commonplace bills, for "Simpkin's blue ribbon men," setting forth the evils of drink, with extracts from speeches by Sir Wilfrid Lawson, &c. Under these was a sketch of a donkey's head, but whether it was meant as an illustration of the abstainer or non-abstainer was not specified; but Mrs. Bland took it all in, and then back again to the auction bills, until she had almost learnt them all by heart, as the door opened, and a smart boy of fourteen desired her "to walk this way."

Mr. Simpkin was an elderly man, who, as Mrs. Bland entered, merely gave a wave of his white hand in the direction of the chair he wished her to occupy. A large fire was burning in the bright grate, and on a soft pile rug before the same laid a little shaggy dog, who, with his head resting on his paws, merely moved his eyes at her approach; after which he looked at his master, and then at his visitor, as if to ask who was going to begin; and Mr. Simpkin and Mrs. Bland both looked at the dog and then at each other, until the latter, thinking that Mary would be off and leave the house to take care of itself, commenced business by pulling out her purse, which she had much difficulty in opening, and which, when she attained her object, did so by scattering all the coins it contained on the carpet.

"I wish to pay your fee first, sir," said the little woman, growing very red in the face, as she stooped to pick up the money she had dropped, a proceeding watched closely by "Patch," who raised no objection until Mrs. Bland attempted to reach a sovereign which had rolled by his nose, when he evidently would have disputed the right of ownership had not his master interfered by picking up the same and restoring it to his companion.

"Just state your business first, my good woman," said Mr. Simpkin, "and we will see how the case stands before we talk of costs."

"I'm sure, sir, you are very kind," replied Mrs. Bland, as she entered fully into the purport of

her visit, whilst Mr. Simpkin, listening attentively the while, allowed his eyes to roam all round the room, and then to the table, where he picked up one or two packets of papers tied with red tape, with no other result than to put them down again; and when at last his visitor had come to the end of her story, he remained so long silent that she had sufficient time to read the different names written in white paint on the several tin boxes ranged on shelves round the room, as she had studied the bills in the clerks' office, before that gentleman addressed her.

"And you say you can fully corroborate your statement?" he at last said, just as she was endeavouring to make out some letters on an iron safe facing her.

"Fully what, sir?" asked Mrs. Bland, not exactly understanding his meaning.

"You say you have proof of what you say?" he again asked.

"Yes, sir, even that," and she pointed to something particular in one of the papers she had handed to him.

"And what was your motive for complicity in this crime?"

"I had been unjustly dismissed from her ladyship's service, and when I was asked to take the child I did so, not only for the money—although I was poor—but for revenge."

"Very well," replied Mr. Simpkin; "I shall immediately communicate with Lady D'Almaine. Do you know where she is at present?"

"No, sir," said Mrs. Bland.

"It does not matter," replied the lawyer; "I will address to Drungadhen. I have your address also; quite right. You will hear from me shortly," and, touching a spring bell by his side, he wished her good day, as Mrs. Bland left the room.

"Lor, I thought you never was a-coming," says Mary, as she opened the door to the little woman on her return; "another five minutes and I should have been off, I can tell you."

"Anyone been, Mary?" asked the latter, without paying any heed to her complaints, as she untied her bonnet and warmed her hands by the fire.

"Yes, Mr. Arthur," replied Mary; "and what do you think? He has got a son, and I am going to see it to-morrow or the next day!"

"Then he told you where he lives? That's more than he has his mother," said Mrs. Bland; "but I suppose he wants me now, or he wouldn't trouble to find me out."

"Go on," said Mary; "you couldn't expect but what he'd marry; then what are you so cross about?"

"He could have waited; but let's have a cup of tea," replied Mrs. Bland, as she took up a strip of paper with her son's address, muttering to herself the while, "it's a bad job, a bad job;" and then suddenly recollecting she was not alone,

"Aren't you going to Blackfriars?" she asked.

"No," replied Mary, "it's too late," and she commenced preparations for making the tea for which Mrs. Bland had expressed a desire.

"Why, you look worn out!" she continued, as she poured out the refreshing beverage; "I wonder who that is!"

The latter sentence was in allusion to a knock at the street door, and an ejaculation of surprise and delight from Mary as she opened the same.

"Well, I'll be blest," laughed the latter; "how are you, Charlotte? You want Mrs. Bland? Well, she's downstairs, come in."

"Are you out again?" asked Charlotte, after waiting to get a word in, as Mary jabbered on like a monkey, all in one breath.

"Yes, who can stand their cheek (alluding to the mistresses)! I can't," and Mary hastened to tell Mrs. Bland all about it. For the moment Charlotte had forgotten the purpose of her errand, but when the former told Mrs. Bland that she was the under-housemaid at Lady Howard's with her, she suddenly remembered the importance of her message.

"Yes, ma'am," she said, "and my lady is very ill, and has sent you this," and she handed a letter to the little woman.

Mrs. Bland took the same, which she anxiously opened, as the girls continued their conversation, and she read,—

"Come as soon as you have this, Martha. I am very, very ill, and something tells me that I shall never leave the bed on which I now am. I told you every cloud had a silver lining. Come now."

"FLORENCE HOWARD."

"Tell my lady I will be round as soon as possible," said Mrs. Bland, addressing Charlotte, who was giving the other a full account of the doings at Chester-place—how that Miss Edna had run away and hadn't been heard of for close on a year, and that Lady Howard had been ailing ever since.

"I didn't know as how you knew Lady Howard!" said Mary to Mrs. Bland, as she descended again to the kitchen, after having seen the last of Charlotte.

"Long before you did," was the reply, as Mrs. Bland again adjusted her bonnet and shawl; and, after giving directions to Maria, the servant girl, sallied forth towards Chester-place.

CHAPTER VII.

"QUITE a gentlemanly young fellow!" said Lady D'Almaine to her niece, as Arthur raised his hat, and the carriage drove from Elm street.

"And doesn't his wife seem like a lady? I never heard anyone in their station of life speak so well," replied Constance. "I am so glad you came, auntie; and I must buy something for the baby," she rattled on, as Lady D'Almaine, lost in thought, leant back in the carriage.

The meeting with this young couple seemed to have awakened in her an undefinable interest for which she could not account; and she readily acquiesced in her niece's desire—that they should at another time not long distant again visit the compositor's wife.

"Don't you know who that was we just passed?" she said, as a gentleman on horseback passed close to their carriage as they were entering the Park gates.

"No. Who?" asked Constance, endeavouring to catch a glimpse as he disappeared down Rotten-row.

"Why, Horace D'Almaine, the new claimant for the estate of Drungadhen; a son, he declares, of your late uncle's dead brother by a former marriage, of which he has at present brought forward no proof," replied her ladyship.

"I have heard of him," said Constance. "He is in the Guards, is he not?"

"Yes, and until a few weeks was known as Captain Mountrevor. But here we are!" and as the footman opened the door Lady D'Almaine, followed by Constance, alighted from the carriage.

A severe frost setting in the streets became so slippery that the ladies remained indoors; and some time elapsed before they again visited Eddy in her humble home; and when they once more drove to Elm-street they found the latter sitting up, looking very pretty and interesting, with her baby boy in her lap.

She was very delighted at their visit, and felt the kindness they showed her in thinking of her as she accepted the grapes, &c., brought by Constance, who had not forgotten an expensive and elegant hood for the infant, whose tiny head was quite lost in the same.

"It's quite lovely!" said the old woman who acted as nurse. "And 's beauty 'ead will soon grow to fit it," she continued, as she took the babe from its mother's lap, that the ladies might have a better view of the beauties supposed to exist in its infinitesimal features—a liberty the young gentleman resented by screwing the same into the most hideous contortions, as if to give the lie direct to nurse's assertions.

"Did you ever see such lovely eyes!" she asked of Lady D'Almaine, who had been gazing long and silently on the child.

"Never but once," she replied, with a slight start, as the former, opening the same to their full extent, looked fixedly at her, when, turning to where Eddy and Constance were conversing, she told the latter it was time to leave. And

nurses declared, when she ascended, after seeing them to their carriage, that she saw the tears start to her ladyship's eyes when looking at the baby.

And Lady D'Almaine was silent and thoughtful as they returned to their hotel, until Constance, finding her aunt's replies in monosyllables grow tedious, left her to her reflections undisturbed.

A letter was waiting them on their return, evidently directed by a lawyer's clerk, bearing the stamp of Simpkin and Brothers, solicitors, Lincoln's Inn-fields.

Lady D'Almaine looked at the same, and then again at the address, wondering what the communication could be, before opening the letter; nor was her surprise less as she read the following:—

"To Lady D'Almaine:—

"MADAM.—The honour of an interview with your ladyship, either here or any time your ladyship would like to appoint that we should wait on you, would be esteemed a favour, as we have very important information to impart, involving the interests of yourself and family. Awaiting your ladyship's reply, we are, yours faithfully,

"SIMPKIN AND BROTHERS."

"What can it mean?" said Lady D'Almaine, as she read and re-read the strange letter. "I can only suppose it has something to do with this absurd claim of Captain Mountrevor's. What do you think of it, Constance?" and she passed the letter on to her niece.

"Well, I suppose you will see them, auntie?" said Constance, as she returned the epistle, without making any comment on her aunt's remark respecting Horace Mountrevor.

There was a little romance in connection with that gentleman which she had never confided to her ladyship; and, further than that, Constance had told her she had met him at Mrs. Galbreath's ball. The former supposed he was a stranger to her, but Conny twisted a certain ring—it was his gift—round her finger, and for some time her thoughts were wool-gathering, as she wondered within herself if Horace would persist in his claim; whether there was any foundation for the story he had told her—how that he quarrelled with his father on his second marriage, left home, passing under the name of Mountrevor, never acknowledging his identity until he had heard of the death of Lord D'Almaine, by which, as he died childless, he became heir to the lands of Drungadhen. But she and Horace had quarrelled since then, and when she left her guardian's roof to reside with her widowed aunt she made up her mind never to see him again.

"Write and say I will see them here to-morrow at 11 A.M.," said her ladyship, rousing Constance from her reverie, and dashing to the ground the fairy castles she had raised to her imagination.

Accordingly, the next morning, at the appointed time, Mr. Simpkin arrived at the hotel, and was ushered into the room where Lady D'Almaine awaited him.

The latter requesting him to be seated, he rubbed his white hands preliminary to commencing business, passed one over his head to assure himself that the half-dozen hairs, which lured him into the belief that they covered his baldness, were still there; then rubbed them again, and addressed his companion, who sat silently watching these preparations.

"Lady D'Almaine," he commenced, "I conclude you are not aware that there is likely to be an opposition raised to the right you now hold on the D'Almaine estate?"

"I am quite aware of it," replied her ladyship, whose thoughts at once rested on Captain Mountrevor's claim.

Mr. Simpkin's eyes opened to their widest, and his white hand again wandered to his head, to press down any unruly hair which might have stood on end, with astonishment, as she continued,—

"But I have no fear of the result."
"I do not think, madam," replied the lawyer, "that anything can upset the claim of my client."
"Probably not," was her ladyship's answer.
"If Captain Mountrevor can prove his title to the

estate I withdraw, but until then I remain mistress of Drungadhen."

"Captain Mountrevor!" exclaimed Mr. Simpkin. "Your ladyship misunderstands me."
"Then who else has put in a claim?" asked Lady D'Almaine, who, in her turn, now became astonished.

The lawyer drew his chair closer to the table, and folding one hand over the other, looked fixedly at the lady before him.

"I believe, my lady," he commenced, "twenty years ago you had a great trial—the loss of a boy, then four years of age, the only child of yourself and Lord D'Almaine, who at the time was supposed by the ignorant in the neighbourhood to have been spirited away, no one being able to account for his mysterious disappearance."

"I had so," replied Lady D'Almaine, her every feature quivering with excitement. "Proceed."

"My lady," continued the lawyer, "could you, do you think, after so long a time, recognise the son you lost when a child?"

"Yes! yes!" exclaimed her ladyship, "time could never kill the maternal instinct, if even there were not other proofs, of my child's identity. Tell me, Mr. Simpkin, tell me, does my son live?"

"He does, Lady D'Almaine," was the reply; "but not reared in your station, and wholly unconscious of the rank in which he was born; but, if you will allow me, I will ring the bell, as I have someone downstairs you might like to see—the woman who has brought up your son as her own, and can inform you how he came into her possession."

A few minutes later and the rustle of Mrs. Bland's best dress was heard in the corridor, as the door opened, and she was ushered into her ladyship's presence.

The latter failed to recognise in the little round woman before her the slim, trim figure of the girl who had been dismissed from the position she had held in her service as nurse to her infant son twenty years ago; but as, in obedience to Mr. Simpkin, she told her who she was, Lady D'Almaine fully remembered the face before her, as also the threat, at the time considered idle, that she held out, that she would make it hot for her ladyship for what she looked on as a wrongful dismissal.

"Martha!" exclaimed Lady D'Almaine, as she listened to her confession, "and is it through you that I have suffered all these long years? May Heaven forgive you, I never can;" and as she gazed on the miserable woman before her she longed to spurn her from her presence, at the same time that she drank in every word with reference to her son.

"Oh! my lady, my lady!" cried Mrs. Bland, as she threw herself on her knees at her feet, "I know I have been wicked—very wicked; but I was tempted when my blood was up at being sent away for a fault I never committed, and then I couldn't go back. But I was good to him, my lady, and loved him as though he were my own."

"And who tempted you?" asked Lady D'Almaine, as she stood still gazing on the woman at her feet.

"Lady Howard, then Florence Guenelda, your bosom friend, my lady. She is now dying, and sent for me to bring you to her. She cannot go, she says, without your forgiveness. Will you come, my lady? Oh! say you will come."

But my lady had fallen in a dead faint on the soft pile of the velvet carpet, unconscious of Martha's entreaties and the efforts of Mr. Simpkin, in his alarm, made to restore her to animation.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE fire flickered in the bright steel grate, throwing fantastic shadows over the darkened room, in which all was silent and still, save for the painful breathing proceeding from the half-tender bed, the blue satin curtains of which were drawn so as to obscure even the glimmer of the blaze from the restless sleeper.

By her side sat an elderly woman, who listened intently, ready to attend to the patient's least

request, and at the appointed time to administer such remedies as were ordered by the medical attendant.

"Hush!" she said, as the door opened noiselessly, and a white mob cap became visible.

"Ain't her ladyship awake?" asked the owner of the same, in a whisper.

But nurse, fearing that even that would disturb the invalid, made a sign that she was to go out, when she would follow.

"Some lady," says the girl, "declares she must see her ladyship at once. She is in the drawing-room—you had better come and speak to her."

So giving one backward look, to be sure the occupant of the bed was still asleep, she descended to see who it was.

"Lady Howard is too ill to see anyone, madam," said the nurse, as she entered the room where Lady D'Almaine awaited her.

She was accompanied by Mrs. Bland, and as the woman recognised the latter she understood that it was at her lady's request they were there.

"I understand," she said, as merely asking if the stranger was Lady D'Almaine, she said she would see if the invalid had awakened.

In a few minutes she returned to say Lady Howard would see them now; and cautioning them not to excite the patient, she led the way to the sick-room.

"Adelaide D'Almaine," said the former, as after the nurse having propped her up with pillows she left her alone with the visitors, "I have sent for you, it is at the last moment, to confess a great wrong I did you twenty long years ago, the only reparation I can make for a crime which, may be, you can never forgive."

Lady D'Almaine looked at the woman, on whom she could plainly see the angel of death had placed his seal, and that but a few days would elapse before she would have to answer before her heavenly judge for the great wrong she had done her, as, taking the wasted hand she held out to her, she pressed the same, assuring her she had come prepared to forgive and be forgiven.

"You know," continued Lady Howard, "that five years previous to that time, when as girls we were devotedly attached to each other, we were on a visit to my mother's sister at Merton Grange, where you first met Lord D'Almaine, although at that time he had not succeeded to the title; and notwithstanding that I and he had been engaged six months previous, I felt no qualms of jealousy at the attention he paid you, fearing no rival in his affections, until too late. I found my trust had been misplaced—that you had won him from me. I could not even then believe him false to his vows, until I told him of the change I had perceived in his manner to me; and he confessed his love for you, whilst he was fully aware he was bound to fulfil his engagement to me. Stung to the quick with the insult his words conveyed, mad with jealousy, the love I had for him turned to hate, and I vowed inwardly, whilst releasing him from his engagement, to be revenged. I asked him out of consideration, to my feelings, to allow his engagement to yourself to remain a secret until sufficient time had elapsed after his former one had been broken with me, leading my aunt to suppose such took place by my own wish. Six months after I travelled on the Continent, where I read of your marriage, and subsequently the birth of a son. I did not return to England till four years after, when, as you know, we accidentally met in London."

"I remember, I remember," said Lady D'Almaine. "And you accepted our invitation to Drungadhen, where we were to return the next day."

"Yes," replied the invalid, as she moistened her lips with the grapes Mrs. Bland reached her at her request. "Until then," she continued, "I had almost ceased to remember the wrong done me; but the sight of your happiness with the man who had deceived me aroused within me the demon of revenge. I saw how Lord D'Almaine doted on the little four-year-old boy, and through him I determined to wound his heart, as he had broken mine. For some offence, although trivial, of which she was not guilty,

you at that time dismissed Martha, the child's nurse."

"Yes," said Lady D'Almaine; "and she took my boy from me."

"You must not blame her," continued Lady Howard. "The girl came to me when I was dressing for dinner, complaining of your treatment, saying that she was perfectly innocent of what you accused her, to which at the time I paid little attention; but a few moments after she had left my room, and I was about to descend to the drawing-room, I again saw her with the child in her arms. She was desperately fond of the boy, and was crying her eyes out at the thoughts of parting with him, whilst the little fellow appeared to have more affection for her than for his own mother. A sudden idea flashed across my brain, and telling her that I would see her in my room before retiring to rest I passed on. At the hour named she made her appearance, when, after magnifying in her eyes the wrong she considered you had done her, I opened to her my plan by which she could make you suffer as you had made her."

"Oh, Heaven! this is terrible," said Lady D'Almaine, as she again moistened the lips of the dying woman, who then continued,—

"According to arrangement, the next day I asked that the infant Cecil might accompany me for a walk—a request to which you only too gladly acceded—whilst Martha, who had left the previous evening, met me as appointed at the railway station, from whence she was to proceed to London, taking the child with her, where I had agreed to meet her later on."

"I returned to the Castle, as you remember, in a state of the wildest despair, telling you how some strange woman had addressed me when I was making daisy chains for little Cecil; that having completed one longer than the rest I turned to show it to the child, but he was gone, and the stranger I also missed at the same time."

"I need not repeat what followed—how servants were sent in every direction, and telegrams despatched, all as you know useless, I having taken precaution that Martha with her stolen treasure should have arrived in the metropolis long before I communicated the loss at Drungadhen."

"Oh, Florence! spare me the recital, but tell me, where is my boy?" cried Lady D'Almaine.

Lady Howard raised herself on one elbow as she gazed into the face of her visitor. "Spare you," she cried, "you who made my life a blank, the happiest moment of which was when I saw you and him prostrated with grief, as day passed day and no tidings came of the heir of Drungadhen, when each tear you shed made my heart leap with delight."

"May Heaven forgive you, fend rather than woman that you are!" said the other, as she moved from the touch of the hand which Lady Howard had rested on her knee, as in a fainter voice the latter continued,—

"You need not shrink from me now, Adelaide, I am powerless to injure you, whilst all that I can do before death closes my eyes for ever I will do to restore Arthur Bland, the printer, to his proper station as your son, and the Lord of Drungadhen!"

"Arthur Bland!" exclaimed Lady D'Almaine, "the young fellow whose wife I saw but a few days since! Cecil D'Almaine a printer! Oh, Florence Howard, yours has indeed been an awful revenge. How am I to believe you now?"

"On the oath of a dying woman, I swear he is the same, brought up as my expense under the care of Martha Bland as her son."

"Yes, my lady, it is true, too true what I told you, though I loved him, and would have spared him that," said Mrs. Bland, bursting into tears, "had not—"

"Had not I prevented you, Martha," said Lady Howard, as the little woman was, between her sobs, endeavouring to bring a paper from her pocket, which she at last succeeded in doing by bringing the pocket with it, and almost tearing the former, old and worn as it was, as she spread the same before Lady D'Almaine.

It was a reward paper, offering ten thousand

pounds reward to any one who would restore the stolen boy to his parents, Lord and Lady D'Almaine, of Drungadhen Castle; and in the description following of the same was mentioned a certain birthmark on the breast of the child. It was a similar document to the one Mrs. Bland had placed in the hands of Simpkin and Brothers, and as she pointed to the last passage she asked Lady D'Almaine if she remembered the same.

"Yes, yes," she replied, excitedly, as they both now turned to the bed where Lady Howard lay white as death. She had fainted, and they were about to summon the nurse, when once more her eyes unclosed, and motioning to them to remain, after a few moments she recovered. "You are tired, Florence," said Lady D'Almaine; "you must not say any more."

Her anger had all passed, as looking on the past beauty of her once bosom friend she bathed her face with eau-de-Cologne.

"Let me tell you all," she said faintly; "time is short, to-morrow even I may not be here; but if you only knew how I have suffered," she gasped, "you are indeed revenged. The title, the riches for which I married Sir Joshua Howard, brought me nought but misery—he so many years my senior. Our tastes differed, and I soon learnt he drew but a poor comparison between me and his former wife, to whose infant daughter he had hoped I should have been a mother, whilst she from her earliest days instinctively questioned my authority, clinging to her father as her sole parent, until on his death she threw off all the little control I had over her, and one night left my house, refusing my mother's right to question a clandestine engagement she had formed with some person of whose name I was ignorant."

"But I should like to see her once more before I go, and then, with your forgiveness, Adelaide, I should be but too happy to pass from a world in which I have known so little happiness."

Again the pallor of death passed over her features and bidding Mrs. Bland to tell nurse, who was in the adjoining apartment, to come at once, Lady D'Almaine used such restoratives as were at hand, and promising to see her again soon, she and Mrs. Bland took their leave.

CHAPTER IX.

THE following day Lady D'Almaine and Constance, attended by Martha, once more drove up to Eddy's humble home, who, up to the present, was in ignorance as to the change in her husband's position, he also as usual going backwards and forwards to Westminster, little dreaming that the night he and Edna watched the hearse which passed the office door that the same contained the remains of his own father.

The young mother was eulogising the charms of the infant Arthur to the nurse, who declared he was a perfect model, as the ladies entered, holding out their hands, and with such pleasure depicted on their countenances that she was at a loss to assign a reason for the sudden change, from the kind though grand air of superiority with which on previous occasions they had addressed her, to that of friendly equality which they now greeted her.

"Mrs. Bland," at last said Lady D'Almaine, "we have brought you good news, indeed—you are no longer Mrs. Bland."

"No longer Mrs. Bland!" exclaimed Edna, the colour leaving her face white as marble, as all kinds of fears presented themselves to her imagination. "What do you mean, Lady D'Almaine? Has anything happened to my husband?" and, forgetting baby, she almost dropped him from her lap as she appeared about to faint.

"Good news would not mean that, would it?" asked Constance. "No, no, you silly girl," she continued, as her aunt took the seat the nurse offered, and Martha stood staring at Edna's fair face, "your husband has been discovered to be a gentleman. He is my cousin."

"Your cousin! a gentleman!" exclaimed

Edna, wondering whether she or her visitors had taken leave of their senses.

"Yes," replied Lady D'Almaine, "he is my son, stolen from me when a child, and brought up by this woman (and she motioned to Mrs. Bland, who stood in a sort of daze looking on the scene before her) as her own. But send for him, and you shall hear the whole history."

And not until Arthur, breathless and frightened, fearing something had happened in his home, entered, did Edna recover from the amazement which Lady D'Almaine's communication had caused her; but when her ladyship assured him of his relationship to herself, corroborated by Martha, who, bidding him open his shirt, displayed the birth-mark on his breast, the joy he felt for the moment almost unmanned him—joy not so much for himself as for the girl he had made his wife, whom now he could replace in the sphere from which she had descended for his sake.

"But was it mother, here!" he at last said, alluding to Mrs. Bland, as he addressed Lady D'Almaine, "who confessed to you that I was your son?"

"In part, yes," replied her ladyship; "but the whole story of abduction, and the life of labour to which you were destined, was told me by one who, in her last moments, sent for me to confess a tale of wrong she had done me for securing the affections of a man who returned not the love she so passionately felt for him. Poor Lady Howard, her only hope now on this earth, is to see justice done to those she so cruelly wronged."

"Lady Howard!" exclaimed both husband and wife in one breath. "Lady Howard, of Chester-place?"

"The same," replied Lady D'Almaine. "Do you know her?"

"Yes, yes," answered Edna. "I must go to her. You say she is ill, dying? She was my father's wife; I must see her before she goes."

"I always said you were a lady," said Constance, giving the baby she had been nursing to Mrs. Bland, and telling her to stay at Elm-street until their return, as she insisted on helping to prepare Eddy for her drive.

"Well, if this ain't like a fairy tale," said nurse to Mrs. Bland, after ascending from seeing the family party enter the carriage. "And so this little fellow here is the future Lord of Drungadhen! Bless 'is little 'eart; I allus said 'e was a little beauty;" and the little beauty was hugged and caressed until he resented the familiarity, and set up a tremendous yell.

Mrs. Bland paid but little attention to nurse, as, after soothing the infant, who continued for some time deaf to the soothing process, she endeavoured to draw all she could out of her relative to the affairs of the D'Almaine family. She never knew until now the full extent of her love for the boy she had nurtured as her own, and between them now she felt had arisen an insurmountable barrier. She dreaded more the fact that he must despise her for the part she had played in the past than the knowledge that the difference in their station would alter his feelings towards her.

A knock at the room door aroused her from her reverie, and, in answer to nurse's "come in," Mary entered.

"Lor! well, you're a nice 'un," said that young lady, as, with umbrella in hand, she addressed the little woman. "I waited till I could wait no longer," she continued, swaying first on one leg then on the other, "and thinking 'praps to find you here, started off; but what's up? You do look bad. Oh! ain't he like his father!" she rattled on, referring to the baby, who had fallen asleep in Mrs. Bland's arms; "but I say, ain't you a-coming home! Maria is at her wits' end; she don't know which bell to answer first, and that blessed kid has been a screaming till you could ha' heard him 'ere."

(Continued on page 451.)

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A PLAIN GIRL.

—30—

CHAPTER XXXVI.—(continued).

THE same evening at dinner the Indian mail came in. Exception was always made in favour of Indian letters.

Mrs. Karalake received hers, tore it open, and devoured it along with her meal. Of course there was nothing for me. It made me feel myself even less than a cipher to see one of my companions gloating over my husband's letter while I was left outside the pale of his correspondence; and to hear the other talking over the dinner party she intended giving in ten days' time in my house. I felt rebellious as I listened.

"Mother," said Miranda, "it's quite time now we did something. Sir Anthony will be dead six weeks by the twenty-fourth. We really ought to have a small dinner party—say of sixteen!"

"Very well, my dear; as you please," assented her parent.

"There are the Thomtons, of course; Colonel Moore—that will be three; Lord and Lady Dornford and Miss Dornford—six; Mr. Deane, that youth in the artillery, who said he was up at Murree with George; you will like to ask him. Mr. Chester, the rector, and his sister, for music; Captain and Mrs. Tollemache, and her brother; Lily Sharp, of course, and whoever is staying with her. That, with our two selves, will make sixteen. What do you think of the lot?"

"I think you have made a very good choice," said the old lady, rather abstractedly. "Very nice indeed."

"All but Mrs. Sharp," I put in, bravely. "Do not ask Mrs. Sharp, Miranda; I do not like her."

"Certainly I shall invite Mrs. Sharp, Ellen," she said, in a very pointedly rude manner. "She is my most particular friend. The dinner is chiefly given for her."

"I—I," began the old lady timidly, "rather side with Ellen. She is quite a recent friend, Miranda, and I have heard her called fast; and you must not forget how she treated George once upon a time."

"Dear mother, don't be silly. George soon got over that; that is no reason that she should not be my friend, nor yours either. Of course I can scarcely expect Ellen to like her, or any girl who had the first refusal of her husband. It's not in human nature; everyone likes to be first. No one cares to think they are second."

I felt my cheeks burn, and I would have given a great deal to have been ready with some sharp, quick, spiteful answer; but I never can say anything at all when I am very angry.

My silence was interpreted as giving consent to Miranda's suggestion, and soon she and her mother were deep in the arrangements for Tuesday week, and I left them, and stole away to the nursery.

The nurse was at her supper, the child sound asleep. I noiselessly pulled back the blind, and looked out on the still, moonlit summer night.

It was as light as day, and I noticed the figure of a man standing on the gravel, and looking up steadily at the window. He removed his hat altogether—not as a mere salutation, but to discover his identity, and the moon showed me the face of my father.

He beckoned to me imperatively to come to him, and, making a quick sign of assent, I joined him in another two minutes by the side door, and then, before he had time to speak, hurried him away under the shadow of the big beech trees.

"I can stand it no longer, Nell. I've come to tell you that I have given up all hope, and that I'm going to cross the sea."

"Oh, why!" I asked, anxiously.

"There is no chance for me in England. A ticket-of-leaver is not a man—at any rate, he has no privileges; he is a kind of outlaw. After twenty years all my friends have, I find, totally forgotten me, or are dead—have died with the belief that Philip Deane got off very cheaply, and without a doubt of his guilt upon their minds.

I am sorry, Nellie, that it has turned out so badly for you," he added, laying one hand on my shoulder and looking into my face.

"You may well say so," I assented. "That was a false move, and I know it—going to his rooms, and George—oh, nothing can wash me white in his eyes! Your name has no worse stain than mine, and we are equally innocent!"

"That was mere folly, and only he went off in such a hurry I would have gone to him myself and told him all. In fact, I did call twice, but he was out, and I did not care to face the ordeal of following him up to camp."

"You might wait in this country till he comes home," I said, persuasively.

"No, no; if it's needful I shall come back. I'm only going to America. I'll leave you an address sure to find me. How do you get on here?" pointing to the house.

"Pretty well," shrugging my shoulders.

"You never go anywhere; your very name is hardly known. Miss Karalake is everything, by all accounts."

"She is; she is the mistress, and rules us all."

"But that is absurd. You are no child; you are placing yourself in a false position. You submitted to your husband, but you need not give in to his sister. She is but your guest now. People are saying that Lady Karalake is not very bright, and, by George! they are right! Assert yourself, Nellie. Make it up with Karalake, and then, perhaps, you may both give me a helping hand yet. I do not see where light or hope is to come from; but I have a presentiment—perhaps a foolish one—that I shall not die till my name is cleared!"

We talked for a long time about grandmamma. I prevailed on him to promise to write to her, and to go to see her; and, after a long *à-tête*, I heard the gong sound for prayers.

I gave him a hurried hug and fled into the house, and was in time to take my usual place with as much composure and nonchalance as if I had merely come downstairs from sitting in the nursery.

After this things began to be, in political language, a "little strained" between Miranda and me. When it was only my own comfort that was concerned I did not like to do battle, for the old lady's sake.

She had, according to her lights, been wonderfully good to me, and I held my hand and my tongue, though sometimes the case was a severe trial to both. For instance, I wanted to do some shopping in a big village two miles off, and, as the day was hot and dusty, hinted mildly at the pony carriage; but my hints were thrown away.

Miranda wanted it, and closed my mouth by saying that as I was so very fond of walking I might just as well walk to Allbridge as about the park.

So I walked, and when I came home, very hot and tired, went up as usual straight to the nursery. Here I discovered Mrs. Karalake, sitting on a low chair by the window, nursing baby, and looking unusually solemn, even for her.

I saw that she had something on her mind, but she did not burst out with it at once as I would have done.

"I'm afraid you are tired, dear," she said, as I tossed off my hat and drew off my gloves.

"I'm very hot and thirsty—that is all. I had such a lot of little odds and ends to get! It is only four o'clock."

"Too early for tea," said Mrs. Karalake, who was very rigid with regard to the hours at which we took our meals. There was never any margin, one way or the other.

But I had my own little teapot and private store of tea, and cared for none of these things, and a cup of tea I was resolved to have, and at once. I went over to a press and opened it, and promptly brought out my own private equipage—tea-cup and saucer, milk-jug, tea-caddy, and a tin of biscuits, whilst Mrs. Karalake watched my movements in stony silence. This surreptitious tea-making, she boldly declared, was contrary to the rules of the house.

"I often have a cup here," I said. "I'm so fond of tea, and there is nothing so refreshing, and you know that I often don't go down to the drawing-room because you have a crowd of people,

and I make it here alone. I would far rather miss my dinner."

At this moment a housemaid came to the door and said,—

"Did you please to ring?"

"Yes," I rejoined. "Please send up Moss, and tell her to bring a kettle of hot water and some cream."

The girl gave a kind of grin, and said,—

"Beg pardon, my lady, but Moss is gone—"

"Gone! Gone where?" I said, pausing, in the act of ladling out the tea in a shell.

"Please, ma'am she's gone away."

I stood staring at her, unable to take this in. Moss was my maid and George junior's nurse—my right hand, my refuge in all my anxieties about his health, my very rock of strength, my treasure.

I was so utterly overwhelmed that I was positively deprived of the power of articulation for several seconds.

"Go away, Bruce," said my mother-in-law. "I will tell Lady Karalake. In short, Ellen, I had intended telling you at once when you came in, only that you ran on with such nonsense and chatter about tea. Moss was most insolent to Miranda, so she just packed her off at a moment's notice. She has been gone an hour. She got her full wages and board wages, so you won't have any complaints or trouble."

"Please explain all this more clearly," I said, in a tone so different to my meek, everyday voice that Mrs. Karalake gave a little jump in her chair, but she said rather irritably,—

"Oh! no one could put up with the insolence of a strange servant, you know. You could not expect Miranda to stand it, and although Moss knew her duties you will easily get another. There are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught."

"But I have not heard what she said or did yet."

"Well, it was all about this room, if you will know. It is a nice sunny one, and Miranda has a fancy for it instead of her own, and to make the night-nursery her boudoir. I know she has been thinking of it for some time, and to-day she thought of moving in, and came here and gave some orders; Moss and baby to go to the story above—just the same aspect but a flight higher; and Moss would not move, and was so insolent that Miranda, who, you know, my dear, never brooks contradiction, just had her turned out of the house then and there, gave her half-an-hour to get ready, and she packed up her things and went."

"I never heard of such impertinence," I said, at last.

"Ah!" triumphantly, "I knew that you would take one view, though Moss stormed and said very different."

"Such impertinence as Miranda's, I mean, Mrs. Karalake."

Mrs. Karalake gave me a fixed look, and her jaw dropped.

"It is simply intolerable. I wonder you permitted her, in my absence, to interfere with my servant and my nursery. If Moss was insolent I would have spoken to her, and she would, I am sure, have made Miranda an ample apology; but such a high-handed proceeding as to try to turn the child out of his nursery without a hint to me, and to send away his nurse, leaving him with none, is beyond bearing."

"Ellen—Ellen, my dear. Think of what you are saying; think of your position; do keep your temper."

But this warning tone had no horrors for me now. I was resolved to emancipate myself then and there from Mrs. Karalake, George's deputy jailer—nay, from all the Karalakes.

"I am quite decided in what I am saying. My temper is beside the question, and as to my position, as you term it, it will be a very different one from this hour. Nay, hear me, please, without interruption. I foolishly gave in to George's folly, and accepted his arrangement, as if I were a wretched creature glad to hide my head. I put myself, being innocent, in a very false position, and I leave that false attitude now. I was weak—I was nearly prostrated—I gave in for quiet and peace—now I am alive to everything, and to my own miserable folly. Your charge (so

called) of me has been kind, but after to-day it will cease; I need no longer trespass on your other occupations.

"I am of age—I am George's wife. He has by his silence condoned my folly, which was not folly, or wickedness, but duty. I make a new departure now. For your sake I have submitted to Miranda, and held myself in subjection in my own house, but she has passed the bounds of my forbearance to-day. She shall feel and know that I am not the imbecile, silly doll she deems me, with not a thought in my head beyond the nursery and needlework. She acts as if she is the mistress of this house, whereas she is but an ordinary guest. I shall recall Moss at once, and will be much obliged if you will kindly keep baby for a little."

As I spoke my words seemed to leap out of my mouth. I felt all of a glow. I felt somehow that I towered over Mrs. Karlake.

She tried to answer me, but failed. I saw fear in her eye—fear, doubtless, of some awful scene between Miranda and me, where we would fly at one another, and scratch each other's faces, and tear out handfuls of each other's hair.

"You need not be afraid, I shall manage it quietly," I said. "You yourself must surely see that it is not fit that the wife of your son, the head of your house, should be a Cinderella to his sister!" and, so saying, I swept out of the room, and did not bang the door.

I went quickly downstairs, and out into the yard, and called a groom. It was a novelty to see me giving orders.

"Carson," I said, "get a horse at once, and I will give you a telegram to send from Allbridge." I knew Moss's home address, and the telegram would arrive before she got home, begging her when she received it to return at once.

In five minutes Carson was clattering out of the yard, and as I went back into the hall I came face to face with Miranda.

"I was obliged to send your nurse Moss away, Ellen—inolent, detestable, creature! One of the women from the lodge will come up till you can get a sensible nurse."

She was about to walk on with her usual style, of "folding me up and putting me by," when I detained her with a gesture, and said,—

"Just come into the library for a moment, Miranda; I have something to say to you."

"Dear me!" with an affected laugh; "how tragic we are!" slowly, following me into the room.

I closed the door after us, and said, with the glow of my newly-found courage still possessing me,—

"Miranda, you have occupied my place for a sufficiently long time. I would have borne with you longer, but this is the climax. I may not garden in my own garden, select my own guests, use my own carriages. So far that affected only myself, and I said nothing; but when you turn my boy out of his nursery, and dismiss his nurse, you cross the rubicon. I am all for peace; feuds in families are detestable. One word is as good as ten; for the future kindly bear in mind that you are my guest!" and paused, and looked her steadily in the face.

"I never heard of such rubbish, you little fury! just because I dismiss your trumpety nurse! This is my brother's house; and I shall do what I please in it, and not ask your opinion." She looked as if she could have struck me as she spoke. "And you know that he has long ago repented his folly in marrying you in sackcloth and ashes. I doubt if he would have you under his roof if he could have helped it."

"Never mind, my amiable Miranda!" I said, in such a studied civil tone that she looked as if she could not believe her ears. "It is no affair of yours what George thinks of me—it is a question of what I think of you, and if you make yourself prominent in my house I shall treat you (having given you fair warning) exactly as you treated Moss—you will have to leave at once. The servants have sense enough to know who is their legal mistress, and they will not dare to obey you against my orders, or they will be dismissed. Spare me the pain and yourself the humiliation of these orders being sent down to

the housekeeper, and be so good as to hand me over the keys."

The keys were in a little red basket on the writing-table, and Miranda, in a sudden, furious impulse of baffled rage, dashed at them and flung them, basket and all, straight at my head, saying,—

"Hateful woman, I shall pay you out for this yet," and then fled out of the room without another word, leaving me to pick up her missiles, and replace them in their basket, thanking my stars very warmly that the dreaded interview was over, and that Miranda had not, in accordance with her kind intention, bruised me, put out one of my eyes, or marked me for life.

At dinner time she came down, looking pale and sulky, and a little nervous. I was quite calm, and affected to ignore her display of temper in the library. I went quite coolly and took my place at the head of the table, and motioned her to her side.

I know she would have liked to have run a carving-knife into me by the gleam in her eye, but there were three men waiting, and she dissembled; so did I, for I said, with a kind of matter-of-course manner, for their benefit,—

"It is time I begin my new duties, Mrs. Karlake, is it not? I've been very lazy and have had a long holiday, but I must put my shoulder to the wheel—that weary housekeeping again—or I shall be getting out of practice, and what would George say?"

This was for the benefit of the servants' hall, and Mrs. Karlake muttered and smiled assent.

CHAPTER XXXVII

AFTER a storm came a calm. Mrs. Karlake, finding that I had vanquished Miranda in single combat, took part (like human nature) with the strongest side, and that was with me. I think in her heart, she, too, was glad to throw off Miranda's yoke.

I was an easier mistress. I invited her special old cronies to lunch and dinner. I drove her about in the pony carriage to her heart's content; I studied her wishes as much as I possibly could without giving up my freedom; and I invited her to constant and long *séances* in the nursery.

Moss had come back. She at first refused to make any apology to Miss Miranda. She would not call her Miss Karlake, but as she owned to me that she had given her "a good piece of her mind" I prevailed upon her, for the sake of the immediate comfort of all parties, to speak a few words of regret.

"'Tis only for your sake, miss"—she called me miss sometimes still, for she had been a friend of Morris's, and known me in those days of hollow splendour in Park-lane, so all was quiet now. I did not too abruptly dethrone Miranda, as she I'm certain, would have dethroned me.

I came to my sovereignty by slow and sure and easy stages by the twenty-fourth, the day of the dinner-party, and had the reins quite gathered up, and felt the ground quite secure under my feet. All the guests had accepted, and I took great pains with the menu, and personally conducted the floral decorations. I had a taste for flowers, and the table did me credit. The guests were all of Miranda's selection; and oh! that Colonel Moore or Mr. Chester would marry her! It was my first entertainment, and I strained every nerve to do my very best. I wore black velvet and diamonds. Black velvet was not strictly mourning, but then I was only Sir Anthony's niece-in-law, and I looked so nice in black velvet!

Mrs. Sharp had been prepared for the new dynasty by Miranda, and took it all with cool nonchalance.

I left her entertainment to her friend. Dinner was good, no hitches, no burnt soup, watery sauce, or vague *entrées*, and after dinner everyone was in high good humour. I set the elders to play whist, the musical people to the piano, the bores to talk to each other; and my duties done I appropriated Mr. Deane, a fair youth with a very receding chin and a watery and uncertain eye. I had my own reasons for selecting him; he had

been at Murree with George, and I was now going to have a nice long talk with him about Mrs. Thorne!

I walked out through the open French window into a long balcony or verandah that overlooked the moonlit park, with Mr. Deane in my train. We were not alone though. At a distance another couple had seated themselves to survey the landscape, and were presumably discussing it in whispers.

"This bright white moonlight reminds me of India," said my companion, launching out into the very topic that I wished to start. "It's almost as light as day."

"How much I should like to see India," I replied. "I'm sure I would like it."

"I'm certain you would," assented Mr. Deane. "All ladies do. They are made no end of out there, especially if they happen to be pretty," launching a long look at me. Was this silly boy, though he was probably older than me, trying to pay me compliments! I felt inclined to box his ears.

"It's not to be made a great deal of that my ambition tends. I would like to see the country, the scenery, and the native people. What struck you as the finest scenery you have seen?"

"Oh—well—ah—scenery is not much in my line, but, of course, Murree is considered quite tip-top. I was there all last hot weather, and there was no end of fun. Your husband was the great man up there." (Ah! now we are getting to it nicely.)

"How do you mean?" I asked, innocently.

"Oh! being an A.D.C. and a good-looking fellow, and a first-class rider and polo player. He went a heap of races, too; he won the ladies' race—that is, a bracelet given for competition among ladies' horses, ridden by men nominated by their owners."

"And for whom did my husband ride this interesting race?"

"Oh, Mrs. Thorne, of course."

He regretted the "of course" the instant the words had slipped off his tongue, but his regrets were too late. I did not affect to catch the meaning, and said,—

"I believe he knows the Thornes very well. Are they nice people?" in my most dulcet tones.

"Hum—ah—well—strictly between you and me, Lady Karlake, I don't think you would care about them. Thorne is a racing man, keeps horses, and has got your husband to ride for him. That's how he knows him, but he is a bullying, drunken, little sot."

"And she?"

"Oh, she! Well, she's a bit rapid, you know, rides men's horses all over the place, bets, takes presents and that, but she has a thundering good figure, and knows how to make use of her eyes, and all that sort of thing, and some men find her awfully fetching."

I did not like this description at all.

"She always affects rich fellows in the cavalry, you know."

"Nay," rather sharply, "how should I know, nor, for the matter of that, care! She does not seem to be a nice sort of person. Let us change the subject, and talk of something else."

"You are quite right, we will. She is not worth discussing; and goodness knows, she gave enough reason for talk last May," expressively.

"Her name was over the whole presidency."

"In connection with another name?" I asked, simply.

"Yes," turning very red. I could note his sudden suffusion as we were now re-entering the drawing-room, "in connection with another name, of course."

I looked at him, and he looked at me. I read in his eyes what I dared not ask, and what he dared not tell me, but I knew it as well as if he had spoken. That name was George's.

Autumn had set in—leaves were fluttering and falling, trees were becoming bare every day. One of these chilly October days I was summoned to London to grandmamma's. She was very ill; according to Morris her hours were certainly numbered.

I hurried off at once. Mrs. Karalake made no objection, and if she had I should not have been restrained by it. I arrived in time. She was still conscious, but speechless; it seemed to afford her pleasure to lie looking at me, with her thin, wrinkled hand in mine, her dim eyes fixed on my face. I read to her, I talked to her of myself, of George, of my father. She heard all, and nodded her head—her tongue was paralysed.

She lingered on in this state—a kind of living death—all the winter, such is the clutch that some aged people have on life. I was obliged to send for Moss, and the boy and the boy's grandmother followed him up to London, and settled herself for the winter in her town house, coming over to see me daily, or I going to see her.

Miranda had joined a gay party, and gone out to Cairo, and I'm sure her mother breathed more freely on account of her absence—I know that I did.

It was quite late in the spring when grandmother passed away. Her death was what is called a happy release; but I was sorry she had not lived to see our name cleared.

A few days after her death and very splendid funeral—all that the most magnificent of undertakers could do was done. A few friends followed the cortege—a few friends, and quite a procession of fine empty carriages! What a hollow mockery is that form of civility sending one's carriage and pair to swell the last train of a dead friend! I hated it and all such pretences.

After the funeral the will was read. It was short and very much to the point. Every penny of my grandmother's large property, money in the funds, her house in Park-lane, and her jewellery, lace, horses, plate, and equipages were bequeathed to me—to Ellen Lady Karalake.

I gasped. I involuntarily drew in my breath, as I listened to the family lawyer rolling large sums off his tongue with slow unction. All these sums were mine!

I had had no idea of grandmother's wealth. She had trebled a large fortune in lucky investments, notably by the purchase of land in the metropolis, and in a rich mineral district, and I was now quite independent of the Karalake purse. I was a very, very rich young woman.

There was a sealed letter for me, which I opened and read alone. No money was to be spared in tracking down the real murderer of Mr. Sim, and I was to pay a large sum annually to my father. The letter was long, but this was the gist of it.

Old Mrs. Karalake was charmed at my sudden accession to fortune, and bargained to me over and over again on the subject of my good luck till I was really out of patience.

"It is very fine, of course, and very acceptable; but it is not everything. Money cannot purchase health, or happiness, or a fair name, or justice, or love. Money is not such a wonderful magician after all."

I said this bitterly enough, as I stood looking round my own drawing-room, and my mother-in-law sat near the fire with her bonnet untied, a cup of tea in her hand, and with her grandson crawling at her feet.

I was thinking that I would gladly change places with some happy mechanic's wife who had her husband's love and confidence, who had no Colonel Kant or Mrs. Thorn to fear, and no ugly secrets in the past history of her relations.

Great events, bad and good, generally happen in trios. The spring grandmother died I became quite a female millionaire, hostilities broke out again in Afghanistan, and in a sharp action George was badly wounded. The first I heard of it was through the papers. It happened that very day that I had been running down the power of money.

I had begged Mrs. Karalake, whom I now termed "grandmamma," to stay to dinner, as she often did; and as we sat over the fire afterwards, talking in low voices, the discordant cries of newspaper boys and men passed under the window. Their shouts were Babel, but I caught the words "desperate fighting."

I ran over to the window, and opened it, and leaned out, and listened.

"Desperate fighting. Retreat of the enemy. Heavy losses. Many men and officers killed."

I drew in my head, and went over and tore at the bell. Hanks, the butler, thought that the house was on fire, for he hurried up as fast as his portly person could run.

"Hanks," I gasped, "a paper at once."

And then I turned, and sat down, and waited. Mrs. Karalake who was a little deaf, and had been nodding and dozing, did not understand what I was waiting for. I'm sure she fancied it was coffee, and I did not disabuse her mind. What was the use of tormenting her for, perhaps, nothing! Still, I had had a presentiment of something bad as I stood at the window and listened to that street cry. Would that this presentiment would turn out as worthless as that other that had led me on and fooled me for so long.

In a few moments Hanks returned, and placed a thin, very damp newspaper before me.

How it rattled, and how my hands shook as I opened it!

I quickly passed over the large type, and ran my eye down to that list that has made many a heart to break—the list of killed and wounded.

No, he was not among the killed—I drew a quick sigh of relief—but he was among the wounded.

"Captain Johnson, R.A., slightly."

"Captain Elliot, Singapore Light Infantry, severely."

"Sir George Karalake, A.D.C., Major, 29th Hussars, dangerously!"

The paper swam before my eyes. And how was this to be broken to the poor old lady who was sitting up erect, opposite to me, smoothing her cap ribbons, and asking me so innocently, "If there was any news!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AFTER the news recorded in the end of the last chapter we passed three long weeks of terrible anxiety, sometimes trembling at every ring lest it should be the fatal telegram; at others feeling more hopeful, and telling each other over and over again that all would be well yet.

It appeared that George had received his wound in the act of saving the life of a brother officer, whom a Pathan was about to cleave from the chin to the heel. "To the devotion and valour of Sir George Karalake," said the papers, "Colonel MacGregor owes his life at this moment. The 29th Hussars may be justly proud of the gallantry of their comrade, who had thus prominently distinguished himself on more than one occasion."

It was very gratifying to read little paragraphs like the above, and more gratifying still to hear good accounts of the patient—letters to me, not to his mother! Oh! how I tore them open and devoured them! His brother officers wrote to me by every mail. One of the letters I append; it was one of the last I received, and ran as follows—

"DEAR LADY KARALAKE—

"Before the mail goes out I must scribble you off a line, as I know you will still be anxious about the patient. I am glad to tell you that he is to be moved by dhooly—a kind of palanquin—by easy stages to the hills, and up at Murree he will receive every attention from his old friends, the Thorns—Dr. and Mrs. Thorn. No doubt he has often mentioned them. You need not be the least uneasy about him, as I know that Mrs. Thorn is a good all-round nurse, and takes a great interest in George, and he will be in excellent hands. His next move, of course, will be to England on medical certificate, and I am sure, as soon as he can prudently do so, he will be all impatience to set his face homewards. The voyage will do him no end of good, not to speak of you at the end of it. I hear the corporal calling for letters, so conclude in great haste, with kind regards.

"Yours sincerely,

"EDGAR LYON."

Part of this letter was very satisfactory and reassuring, but the latter part of it, with refer-

ence to Mrs. Thorn and her interest in George, was by no means so pleasant. I appeal to all young married women. Would not their hearts burn with fire and fury if they read a similar document, knowing what I knew with regard to Mrs. Thorn! Of course to poor, dear, simple Mrs. Karalake it was all most excellent, and she was truly thankful that her darling boy was about to fall into the hands of such true, good hands. As far as I was concerned I said nothing, but I had almost as soon he had fallen among thieves.

Now that George was reported convalescent, and Mrs. Thorn appeared to be mistress of the position, I fell back on my former attitude of sullen resentment, from which the cruel anxiety I had felt for George for weeks—weeks when I was in such a passion of despair and misery that the mere thoughts of his dying out there alone far away from me, and taking such thoughts of me, as I knew he harboured, with him to the grave, nearly drove me beyond the bounds of sanity. But now, now that he was well, now that he was basking in that woman's smiles—I always called her "that woman" when conversing with myself—now that he had laid his laurels at Mrs. Thorn's foot, it was a totally different affair.

He at once repudiated me; I secretly repudiated him. Not one line had he penned to me, and he might have guessed at my devouring fears; not even a word in pencil of enmity or forgiveness when he lay, as he and everyone around him believed, within a hair's-breadth of the jaws of death.

Each mail as it now came in brought letters from him to his mother. She had no secrets from me now. I saw them, and surreptitiously read them over and over again.

I studied his feeble pencil scrawl, then his feeble attempt with ink, finally his ordinary bold, black calligraphy. There was never one word of Mrs. Thorn. He spoke in a vague, general sense of "kind friends" and "good Samaritans;" and this reticence, this studied silence, I looked upon as a bad—nay, a fatal indication.

By the end of May he wrote that he was quite restored and was coming home, but that his mother must not be frightened to see a very ghastly and emaciated object. He wished to join her at Karalake in June; and it seems scarcely credible, but it is quite true, that in all these letters there was not a single allusion to me, and but few to the child.

"You must not mind him, Nellie," said the old lady as I once handed her back a letter, and I suppose she saw a suspicion of tears in my eyes. "These Karalakes—you and I are not real Karalakes by birth—have all very queer tempers. They are themselves the soul of generosity and honour; but once they take an idea into their head it's very hard to drive it out. Your own son will be the same."

"Small comfort to me in that," I said, sharply.

"But they have very good qualities. They are as constant as the sun—another form of obstinacy. Nothing ever weans a Karalake from his first love."

"Mrs. Sharp—Lily Norton—was George's first love," I said, triumphantly, feeling that I had caught the old lady in her own net.

"No, no," very eagerly. "I know him better than you do. He would have been a miserable man, married to that shallow, vain, malicious little creature. You see I have my eyes about me. She was only a passing fancy. She took his eye because she was such a contrast to himself, so very helpless. That was assumed, and so very laughable and so fair—that was assumed."

"Yes, certainly," I assented. "Milk of roses and the last thing in orange hair dye."

"Miranda won't hear a word against her, though," said the old lady, lowering her voice to a whisper, as if she feared that her daughter was listening; but it's a long way to Cairo.

"True," I remarked, very impressively; "but you and I know that Miranda is carried away by impulse, and is neither prudent nor wise."

It was the middle of July before George came home. We had expected him several times, but



MIRANDA, IN A SUDDEN, FURIOUS IMPULSE OF BAFFLED RAGE, FLUNG BASKET, KEYS AND ALL, STRAIGHT AT MY HEAD.

in the end he took us quite unawares. I had been doubtful about staying at Karslake when he was to be there. I was independent now, in every sense of the word. I had my own house in Park-lane, my own servants, my own carriages. Why should I stay? I longed to see George, and yet I dreaded meeting him.

Our attitude to each other for the future was to be so strange. It was not difficult to maintain an armed peace when divided by six thousand miles of sea and land, but it would not be so easy under the same roof.

I hinted my idea of moving back to town to Mrs. Karslake, but at the very first breath of my suggestion she cast up her hands and her eyes and said that "it was out of the question. Was I mad. I must study appearances. If we had been humble folk it would not have been so imperative, but now there was George's position in the county as a landowner and representative of such an old family.

"I was a marked woman, thanks to my wealth. Yes, and my looks," she added. "Then there was the child to be thought of. What would people say if George's return was the signal for my leaving his house?"

"They may say what they please," I said, defiantly.

"No, my dear, they may not. You cannot afford to cut Mrs. Grundy or to flout public opinion; and besides this, I'm sure that you and George will make it up. He is very fond of you."

"Oh, very," I assented, sarcastically.

"He is, I am sure," she proceeded, with increased animation.

"Very well, grandmamma. I'll take your word for it," I replied, bitterly.

"And besides, my dear, in letting the full light of public opinion in upon you and George's affairs, by living aloof and alone, you will be the sufferer—he will not. In these cases it's the woman who gets all the suspicion and the man sympathy—no matter which of them is in the wrong—so be guided by an old woman and stay."

Miranda had returned to be in time to welcome her brother. She was more guarded and more civil, but stray little straws showed me how the wind blew, and she hated me secretly, more bitterly, than ever.

As I have said previously, George came home in the end quite unexpectedly. I was out when he arrived. I had taken Moss, and baby, now aged one year and four months, and no longer a baby, but a young gentleman who could walk, and who could drag things off tables by the slight effort of standing on tiptoe.

I had taken him for a nice long country drive after his dinner. I had a very pretty phaeton and pair of cobs of my own, and drove up to the door about five o'clock, in time for George junior's tea.

The cobs were hot, and I stood for a moment giving directions to the groom to walk them about, and then I ran up the steps, and passed into the nice, dim, cool hall. I thought that Vokes looked at me rather curiously—in a kind of semi-paternal manner, but I never dreamed of it being due to anything out of the common. By our latest reckoning, George, not having come home in the *Rome*, was not due now for another week.

"Where is Mrs. Karslake?" I was going to say, but I knew it was a silly question.

She was bound to be buried in the cosiest chair in the drawing-room—a novel on her knee, and a fan in her hand—declaring that "it was the hottest afternoon she had ever known." She made this statement on an average three times a week during the summer.

I opened the door and went in, taking off my hat as I did so. It was a large, long room, with a big window and pillars at the far end, as well as three windows on the left hand as you entered.

All the striped blinds were down; ferns and exotic plants in pots gave a green look to the *tout ensemble*.

Mrs. Karslake was sitting facing me, and Miranda was standing up, in the act, I fancy, of leaving the room.

"How nice and cool you are in here! I—" The rest of the sentence died away on my tongue, as I noticed the back of a man's head just above one of the two wicker chairs.

(To be continued).

THE herd of European bison protected by the Tsars of Russia in the forest of Bjelowlaki, Lithuania, numbered 1,900 in 1856, but is now reduced to 500, and shows no sign of increase. The dwindling of the herd is ascribed to in-breeding, due to the confined area of the reservation.

THE Peruvians certainly show great ingenuity in the manufacture of pottery. A favourite form of vessel has a long, slender neck and rather stout, chunky body. The vessels for the most part are made to represent living creatures, and have openings for the eyes, nostrils and mouth. When these vessels are filled with any liquid the air rushes from these openings with characteristic sounds. A vase representing a mountain-cat gives forth sounds like the mew of the living creature. A bird-design sings or whistles; a dish with coiled serpents hisses. Other figures squeak or screech, according to the animals they resemble. An amusing object is the figure of a very old woman. When water was turned into this jar there were sounds of sobbing and grief, and tears trickled from the eyes and rolled down the cheeks. A peculiar design was a vessel shaped like a double-headed bird. This jar must be filled from the bottom, and yet not a drop would flow out when it was turned over, although if it were slightly inclined the water ran out readily. These people appear to have reduced atmospheric pressure to a science. Their knowledge of this is only equalled by their ability in portraiture. Some of the faces are wonderfully lifelike and expressive, and show a very keen sense of form and an excellent understanding of facial expression.



ONE SPRING AND RONALD WAS IN HIS SEAT BY THE GROOM'S SIDE.

LORD KINGSLEY'S HEIR.

—32—

CHAPTER XIII.

It was one of the chief traits in Viola Orme's character that she always leant to the weaker side.

William Thorndale had proved his own worthlessness to her, and had striven to do her a cruel injury, yet, no sooner did the news of his misfortune reach her than she was prepared to pity him extremely, and to cordially detest the usurper who was to rob him of all he had expected to be his own.

Lady Ashlyn had rented a house on her brother-in-law's estate ever since her husband's death; but it was beyond walking distance of the Abbey, and Lady Kingsley had so expressly told her sister she should not be able to come over until after the house party, invited to slaughter the partridges, had dispersed; that it was the greatest possible surprise to the Countess to see the well-known barouche drive up to her door on the last day of August.

"It is your Aunt Jessy," she said to Viola, who, looking the picture of beautiful girlhood in a soft white cambric dress, was busy arranging some flowers for the dinner-table.

"Her carriage," corrected Viola, smiling, "not herself. Aunt Jessy never paid us a visit at eleven o'clock in the morning in her life; besides, to-day, she will be extra busy. The guests asked for the shooting arrive this afternoon, and if Uncle Ronald has not come back she will be at her wits' end."

But Viola was mistaken.

"The Marchioness is in the drawing-room, my lady," announced a servant; "she desired me to say she wishes to see you alone."

Lady Ashlyn and her daughter exchanged glances as the servant left the room.

"Can there be anything the matter?" breathed the Countess.

"Uncle has not come home, and Aunt Jessy

wants you to help her entertain her house party," suggested Viola.

"In that case she could have told me her wishes before you."

Viola blushed crimson.

"I don't think Aunt Jessy likes me as much as she used to do. Mother, dear, if you make any promises about going to the Abbey, please leave me out of it. We have only just got home, and I want to stay here; and now you will have Aunt Jessy seriously offended if you keep her waiting any longer."

But when Lady Ashlyn reached the drawing-room and caught sight of her sister she was positively frightened. The Marchioness was pale and wan. Her eyes were red with crying, and her whole expression was of the utmost dejection.

"My dear Jessy," and the Countess kissed her fondly, "what can have happened to distress you so? I do hope you have no bad news of Ronald!"

"He came home yesterday."

"And he is well?"

"In the best of health; but he has broken my heart."

The elder sister began to fear that Lady Kingsley was suffering from some delusion. Could she be threatened with brain fever, and this extraordinary mood be the first symptom of the complaint?

"My dear Jessy! Every one knows that Ronald adores you, and would give his life to spare you pain. You must be beside yourself to think otherwise."

Lady Kingsley burst into tears.

"I am not like you, Elizabeth. I have no child of my own, and I love Will with all my heart. He was only a little lad when he first came to us, and he always cared more for me than anyone else. Ronald has been harsh to him often; but I never dreamed of this!"

"Do you mean that Will and his uncle have quarrelled?" asked the Countess, beginning to think that perhaps it was as well her wilful Viola had refused to marry young Thorndale.

"It's worse than that. I shouldn't mind a quarrel. Lord Kingsley is too warm-hearted not to forgive him soon."

"Then what is it?"

"Will is disinherited."

"But he can't be," said Lady Ashlyn, bewildered; "you know as well as I do that the property is entailed, and Will is the heir-at-law."

"He was. You know how Ronald has been rushing about the country lately. Well, it seems he has been trying to find a nearer heir, and he has actually succeeded. He means to bring home a vulgar wretch brought up as a grocer's boy to Kingsley Abbey."

"Jessy, do be calm," entreated her sister; "how can I understand if you talk so wildly!"

"I feel wild," said poor Lady Kingsley. "The story is simple enough; some wretched man who came back from the colonies this summer has actually persuaded Kingsley that his brother John was married."

"I do not feel surprised myself," admitted the Countess. "Nothing else would explain the strange retirement in which he spent his last years. Why, even his own father often never knew where he was."

"Well, he was married and left a son; just because this boy's father was a year older than poor Will's, my boy must lose all."

Lady Ashlyn looked troubled.

"Ronald is sure of his proofs, I suppose!"

"He ought to be," retorted Lady Kingsley, "for he's been like Cain rushing to and fro on the face of the earth to find them. I told him last night that he ought to have silenced Mr. Talbot, and buried his suspicions in silence. If this miserable stranger did not claim his rights, why should Will be despoiled for his sake?"

Lady Ashlyn shook her head.

"It is far better the matter should be settled by Ronald in his own life time. If the question were raised after his death, a long and expensive lawsuit might follow."

"Don't talk like a book," said the Marchioness, irritably. "Have you no pity for us?"

"I have a great deal. I know it must be terrible for you and Ronald to have to put a stranger in Will's place, but it is far better this should be discovered now than later. Ronald may live twenty or thirty years yet, and thus will be able to save a handsome sum for William's future."

"There is all my money," said Lady Kingsley; "that is what I came to see you about."

"But that is settled on you," said the Countess, who understood business matters much better than her sister. "You can't touch it."

"It is settled on me for my life, with reversion to you or Viola (whichever survives me) if I die childless; you surely wouldn't grudge the money to Will! I haven't spoken to my husband yet, but I thought if we all signed some sort of paper the law would let me make over the principal to Will."

Lady Ashlyn shook her head.

"I think not."

"You mean you would not renounce your claim?"

"I would renounce mine gladly; but—I am not sure—I believe the money is so settled that it reverts to our father's nearest surviving descendant in the event of your death. I might sign away my own claim, but I could not sign away that of Viola, or her possible children."

Lady Kingsley went off on another grievance.

"My husband says the new heir must come to the Abbey. That we owe it to the good old name to try and fit him for his future position."

"You have not told me his story yet," observed Lady Ashlyn, "and, Jessy dear, we could discuss things so much more easily if I knew his name."

"Ronald Thorndale; his mother was our game-keeper's daughter."

The Countess shrugged her shoulders.

"Then Jack probably married her for her beauty, and as he was one of the handsomest men I ever met, their son ought to be good-looking. How old is he?"

"Twenty-two. His step-father is a grocer's shopman, and his mother, to make him genteel, started him as a city clerk. Oh, Elizabeth, I know just what he will be like, stout, stunted and narrow-chested, he'll stoop from sitting so much over his books, he'll wear paper collars, and his coat sleeves will be greasy."

"Dear, money will remedy all that," said her sister, gently.

"But that's not the worst; he'll talk English like a cockney, and he'll have no more manners than are taught at a Board school. Elizabeth, just fancy, our men-servants will probably be more presentable than my husband's heir!"

In vain Lady Ashlyn strove to think of consolation; she really felt deeply grieved for her sister, though she quite believed Jessy was making the worst of her troubles.

"How does Kingsley take it?"

"I believe he is glad," said the Marchioness bitterly, "at any rate he does not feel for Will as I do."

"And Will, himself! Does he know it?"

"Yes. He is broken-hearted. Think what troubles he has had lately, poor boy! First, Viola's cruel rejection, now this."

"I am very sorry for him," said the Countess, slowly, "but I can't help pitying his cousin."

"For being my husband's heir!" she asked, sarcastically.

"In a measure, yes. I mean it will be hard for a shy, nervous young man, who has seen very little of the world, to be thrown suddenly among strangers who have no desire for his society."

"He ought to be thankful his uncle is willing to acknowledge him."

"Have they met?"

"Yes; but before Ronald had any idea of the relationship. He went over to Dieppe to consult Mr. Grey, and this young man was then acting as his secretary."

"Oh, come, Jessy, if he's a secretary he can't be uneducated!"

"I never said he was," retorted the Marchioness. "I haven't a doubt that he is very sharp, and carried off prizes at the nearest Board school to his home. Anyone can write and spell, and a secretary isn't required to do much else. He won't know how to behave. He will say 'sir' to the butler, and come to dinner in a coloured

suit; most likely he puts his knife in his mouth, and says 'miss' when he talks to a girl. Oh, it's a terrible business!"

"I can't help thinking Kingsley would not bring him here if he were utterly unrepresentable," said her sister. "Now, Jessy, it's no use crying your eyes out! I'll come over to-morrow and help you entertain your visitors. Tell Will I'm very sorry; and, my dear, when the new nephew comes, if he really is very terrible, and you can't introduce him to people, you can always send him over here when you and Kingsley are going to dinner-parties, and the like."

Very hard grew the face of the Marchioness.

"I suppose you think he would do for Viola? but if Will was not good enough for her this fellow would hardly be so."

"I had no such thought," said the Countess. "To confess the truth, Jessy, I did wish very much my child and Will could have come together; but Viola and I have had a long talk since we came home; and, as a result, I have promised never to try match-making for her again. I have explained to her just what her income will be at my death—(my jointure goes back to Lord Ashlyn)—and she says it is more than enough to keep her; so we have agreed she is to please herself, and if she becomes an old maid I am not to reproach her."

It was with a very grave face that Lady Ashlyn rejoined her daughter after the Marchioness had driven away.

"She stayed two hours, dear!" said Viola, reproachfully. "What did she want! I know there is nothing wrong with Uncle Ronald, for I sent out and asked the footman, and he said his master came home yesterday quite well."

Lady Ashlyn gave Viola a brief account of what had happened, concluding with,—

"I am thankful now that you and William Thorndale are not engaged."

Viola smiled, half sadly.

"I never could have been happy with him. But this is most terrible news, and I think I agree with Aunt Jessy it is a pity Mr. Talbot ever told his story to Uncle Ronald."

"My dear! I thought you would be pleased. You have seemed so very hard on Will lately."

"Pleased! I don't consider Will much of a master for that grand old Abbey; but a son of the people—a man of about the social status of a small shopkeeper—why, it's dreadful!"

And to her mother's surprise Viola quite sided with Lady Kingsley; she pitied Will intensely, and when next they met was so extremely gracious to him that he decided she had quite forgiven his conduct at the picnic.

"When is your cousin coming?" she demanded; the occasion being a dinner-party at which Will had been her allotted cavalier.

"He says not till October. Mr. Grey is going to spend the winter at Algiers, and this fellow thinks he can't leave him before he sails."

"Very high and mighty."

"Vastly condescending," agreed Will. "Personally, I am not sorry. It is a kind of reproof."

"Surely you won't stay here to meet him?"

"I must. Uncle Ronald is good enough to offer me the agency of the estate. A sort of cottage goes with the post, and I should prefer to move myself and my belongings there; but poor Aunt Jessy can't bear the thought of it, and Uncle Ronald is good enough to say he had rather I stayed at the Abbey. They seem to think I may be useful as a kind of social tutor to the new heir, teaching him the minor laws of etiquette and that sort of thing."

"But it will be horrid for you."

He sighed.

"A great many things have been horrid for me lately. Now that we are alone, Viola, I should like to ask your pardon for—for what happened at Riverside. I was half beside myself, but I loved you so."

Viola softened imperceptibly, her sympathies always went to the losing side.

"I forgive you freely, Will, and I should like us to be friends. We never can be more, because—"

He looked at her fearlessly.

"Because of Janet Ingleby! Oh, Viola! you

are not the first person who has been deceived by a specious tale."

"Do you mean—"

"I have no doubt she told you the truth down to a certain point. I was the cause, the innocent cause, of her leaving her situation though I had never spoken a word to her that I would not have spoken before you or my aunt."

"When she was homeless and penniless it seemed to me my duty to provide for her, and as she seemed so lonely, poor child, I went to see her sometimes."

"Of course it would have been more prudent to get some lady to befriend her, but you know Aunt Jessy! What would she have said if I had asked her to be good to a pretty little girl who had no claim on her or me!"

"But for the influence little Miss Ingleby would have got a situation in a school, and all have gone well. I am quite sure that she never dreamed of the story she told you until she was ill. I have been told that in very severe cases of influenza the patient becomes so depressed as to take up the idea everyone has injured them, and I think something of the same cause must have made poor little Janet believe so strangely."

And Viola believed him; she, who had had patent proofs of his treachery to herself; she, who had listened to Janet's pathetic story, and later on heard it confirmed by the landlady, was actually duped by Will Thorndale into believing that he was stung against, not sinning.

"Don't take your friendship from me," pleaded Will. "Heaven knows I've nothing else left to make life worth living."

She let her hand rest for a moment in his as she gave her promise.

CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER all Lord Kingsley did not return to Dieppe and personally tell the young secretary of the wonderful change which had taken place in his prospects. The Marquis was passionately attached to his wife. She had not the power to make him do a wrong; therefore, all her lamentations did not induce him to keep secret the discovery that his brother John had left a son, but just because he had to cross her in the great thing he yielded to her in the little, and promised that he would not leave her in order to carry the wonderful news to France.

Surely, she said peevishly, the young man could find his way back to England by himself.

Lord Kingsley had in truth seen very little of Ronald during his flying visit to Dieppe. Utterly engrossed in his own difficulties he had been very absent-minded during the brief space the young man was in his company, and the secretary, with a delicacy which must have been innate in him, was careful to intrude upon the two old friends as little as possible.

Pressed by his wife to remember what the "usurper" was like, the Marquis really hardly knew what to answer.

"He struck me as very shy. I remember he hardly spoke at all at dinner, and seemed delighted to escape when it was over. Grey praised him up to the sky; declared he was one of nature's gentlemen, and so on. He couldn't have done anything very dreadful, Jessy, or I must have noticed it."

"And you insist on his coming here!"

"My dear, don't fancy I like the idea any better than you do. He must come here for a time. It is part and parcel of acknowledging him as Ronald Thorndale that he should come here and be presented to my friends and neighbours as John's son. I do not say that he will have to live here for the rest of his life."

And his wife's irritation had such an effect upon Lord Kingsley that his letter to Mr. Grey was very different from what it might have been had his kind, generous nature been left unbiassed.

"DEAR GREY,"

"The problem which has troubled me since Jane is solved. John's son is a living reality, and no other than your secretary. There is no

room for doubt. I have seen Mrs. Thorn, and I should have known her anywhere as Molly Dean, the gamekeeper's daughter.

"Jarvis will have to go through a few legal formalities; but the main fact is certain. Your landlady's *protégé* is my nephew and heir.

"Jessy is almost heart-broken over Will's fallen fortune's. Will himself bears his defeat better than we expected. There is no false pride and no malice about the lad. He himself proposed that he should become my agent or bailiff, and remaining in the neighbourhood, help me to teach the new heir a little of the manners and customs of our class.

"Jarvis will take a week or two to get things ready; but I should say that by the 15th all would be accomplished, and Ronald can start for England as soon after that date as he pleases.

"I leave you to tell him of his good fortune. Whatever else happens the moment the breath's out of my body he will have the Abbey and a princely income. Meanwhile I am willing to receive him on a long visit, and introduce him to the county.

"I can't profess pleasure at the prospect of a gamekeeper's grandson being the head of my house, but I will do my duty.

"As to the present I will make Ronald a fixed allowance, to be increased on his marriage. I want you to do all the explanations for me, and so add another to the many kindnesses you have shown your affectionate friend," "KINGSELEY."

"Is anything the matter, sir?"

This question came from Ronald. He had found Mr. Grey silent and abstracted at breakfast, after which the servant had retired to his own room.

Ronald had waited till an hour after their usual time for commencing work, and then he had ventured upstairs, and tapped lightly at Mr. Grey's door.

It was opened instantly, and nothing could have been kinder than the expression of the old man's face as he glanced at his *protégé*.

"Nothing is the matter with me, Ronald," he said, simply; "but I have had a letter from a friend giving me a very delicate commission. I came up here to think over how I could best perform it; but my solitary musings haven't helped me much, so I'll come down and get on with our morning's work."

Fortunately there were few letters to read or answer, and when these had been finished the old man said, suddenly,—

"Everything else can wait till to-morrow. I want to talk to you seriously, Ronald."

"I hope you are not feeling worse," said the secretary, anxiously, for Mr. Grey had had a very bad attack of illness since Lord Kingsley's visit.

"I'm perfectly well, or shall be when I've had a winter in Algiers. I am dreadfully disappointed you can't go with me."

"But I thought I was to go; that you had settled the question."

"So I had; but I didn't know what was in store for you then. Ronald, I can't fence with you, and I am not good at breaking news. Do you know that you are not my landlady's nephew, and not the son of Silas Thorn?"

"I have known it since last June."

"Add haven't you any curiosity as to your true name—your real relations?"

"I have a great deal, but—"

"Go on; I hate half sentences."

"My mother told me my father came of a noble family. After that I wanted to know no more. It seemed to me my duty was clear. I had to work hard to put myself into such a position my proud kindred would have no reason to be ashamed of me. Then I meant to ask my mother my real name, and to go to my uncle, not because I wanted anything from him, but that he might see my father had left a son."

"I am your uncle Ronald."

"What!"

"I will put it differently. Your dead father and my dear wife were brother and sister; you are the son of Lord John Thorndale, and the Marquis of Kingsley who came to see me not long ago, is your father's brother."

"But are you sure? Who told you?"

"Lord Kingsley has lately had a suspicion that his brother John had married privately and left a child; he has advertised for information; and your mother came to his lawyers with proofs of her own marriage and your birth. There are a few legal formalities still to be gone through, and then you will be a very grand person indeed—Lord Kingsley's heir!"

Ronald started; a dark red blush dyed his face.

"I thought that Mr. William Thorndale was Lord Kingsley's heir."

"So did the world in general; but his father was a year younger than yours, therefore you have a nearer claim. I expect Lady Ashlyn is thankful enough now that her daughter is not engaged to Will."

Ronald lifted his eyes proudly to the old man's face.

"If Lady Viola had cared for—for my cousin, his changed fortunes would have made no difference to her."

"Not at all. But then she never professed to care. Ronald, I can't make you out. Don't you understand what I have told you? You will have one of the finest estates, one of the oldest titles in England. Is it possible that you don't care?"

Ronald sighed.

"I care too much," he said, slowly. "I was always ambitious, Mr. Grey; but when my mother told me I had the right to call myself a gentleman, when you took me into your employ, it seemed to me I had gained my dearest wish; now the very greatness of the change frightens me."

"Tut, tut, there's nothing to be alarmed at," said the old man, reassuringly; "there are plenty of young fellows who would be thankful to be in your shoes."

"I know. But remember, Mr. Grey, I go to fill the place of another man. Don't you suppose William Thorndale will hate me for the rest of my life?"

"I never cared for Will," objected Mr. Grey; "you're twice the fellow he is."

Ronald smiled half sadly.

"I saw him once. I think I told you of the occasion; in leaving the Academy I picked up a little satchel Lady Viola Orme had dropped and returned it to her; she said a few words of thanks but Mr. Thorndale was annoyed at the delay. As the carriage drove off I heard him ask Lady Viola why she 'did not give the beggar a shilling and get rid of him.' I think the iron entered my soul then."

"It was bad manners, and unfeeling," agreed the servant, "but my dear lad, you needn't fear a repetition of it. Will Thorndale will be more likely in future to borrow of you than to offer you aims."

Ronald came a step nearer, and spoke with feverish eagerness.

"Do you believe in fate? Do you believe there are moments which influence our whole after life?"

"Possibly."

"That was such a moment to me; before that day I don't believe I really disliked any one. When Mr. Thorndale had driven off I felt as if I hated him. I seemed to feel in my heart that he would do me some terrible injury; that we were destined to meet again."

"Well, I expect you must meet pretty often as you are first cousins; but, Ronald, it is you who do the injury, not Will."

Strong as he was Ronald shuddered from head to foot.

"Can't you keep me as your secretary?" he implored. "I shall never ask Lord Kingsley for anything; why can't he let me go on as I am? I am happy here."

"I would gladly keep you, but, Ronald, it is not a question of inclination. You are the lawful heir to Kingsley Abbey, and must be recognised as such by your uncle in his lifetime, or a long and tiresome lawsuit might follow his death. Then as the heir of the Abbey you are a very important person, and there are a great many little social points you will want to study."

Again that dusky flush.

"You mean I want teaching how to behave!"

"No. Ronald, don't twist my words. You

are a gentleman in thought and feeling. You have been well educated, and speak correctly; but more than that will be expected from the next Marquis of Kingsley. You'll have to ride and drive; you must be able to carry a gun; attend the meets, and be at home on the fen. Then, you have never been to a party in your life!"

"Never; except to Mr. Thorn's annual tea-party to the Bible Brethren, and," with a twinkle of fun in his beautiful eyes, "I don't think that would in the least resemble Lord Kingsley's hospitable gatherings."

"I have lived out of the world so long that I can be of no use to you here," said Mr. Grey. "There's a certain way of doing things people in society have to pick up. They have to hide their feelings, conceal their sentiments, and so on. No, it isn't rubbish! some of it's very necessary. Well, all this you'll pick up at Kingsley Abbey."

"Is the Marquis so deceitful?"

Mr. Grey laughed outright.

"Kingsley's the most truthful man I ever met. Oh, boy, it's hard to explain what I mean. You must get used to being a person of importance—learn how to order people about; never betray your opinions to people who think differently. It's very difficult to make it clear. You'll pick up more at the Abbey in a week than I could tell you in a year."

"And you think I must go there?"

"I fear so."

"And when?"

"Any time after the 15th of this month."

"Then I will go as soon as I have seen you off to Algiers. Oh, yes," as Mr. Grey began to remonstrate, "that will be quite soon enough; I shan't be half used to the idea then."

"You'll soon feel at home. When I come back to England in the spring I mean to offer myself to the Marchioness as a guest, just to see if you've grown too grand to know me."

"You know better, sir. What is Lady Kingsley like?"

Mr. Grey shook his head.

"I can't describe ladies. She is gentle and clinging, worships her husband, and is a little old-fashioned."

"I like old-fashioned people," said Ronald, hopefully; "but then if she is so fond of William Thorndale of course she'll hate me."

"I can't imagine her hating anyone; she is very sweet and gentle; personally, I prefer her sister, Lady Ashlyn."

"Lady Viola's mother?"

"Just so. Lady Ashlyn has far more intellect than her sister, though she is not so gentle. I rather fancy, Ronald, a woman with a big brain always has a large heart to go with it. Now, Lady Kingsley is just the least bit narrow. I have heard her lament over her niece as 'so shockingly fast'; now Viola Orme never did a fast thing in her life; she is a modern girl down to her finger tips, but she never did or said a thing to be ashamed of yet, and she is a hundred times too good for Will Thorndale, for whom the Marchioness designed her."

In due time Ronald heard from his mother, a gentle, loving letter of congratulation. She told him of Lord Kingsley's extraordinary generosity, and of how her husband intended to start a grocer's shop of his own with the welcome roll of bank-notes.

"He is so pleased," wrote Mrs. Thorn, "he actually said I might write and ask you to spend a week with us, but I refused. You belong to a different sphere now, Ronald. I only want you to remember that your own father was one of the noblest men who ever lived, and that my only hope is to see you like him."

From Lord Kingsley's reply to his own letter Mr. Grey gathered the Marquis was divided between relief at the unknown nephew's arrival being postponed and annoyance that the young man should have presumed to alter the date without his leave.

"I have plenty of money," said Mr. Grey, abruptly, one morning soon after Ronald had learned his good fortune, "and I have no one but myself to spend it on; I know you are as proud as Lucifer, but in one matter you must let me have my own way."

"What is it?"

"I know the appearance required of guests at such a house as Kingsley Abbey; you must let me set you up with everything you need, and give you a small sum for pocket-money till the Marquis settles an allowance on you."

"I had much rather not."

"Don't rob me of a pleasure lad, I haven't too many."

And that was why, when Ronald Thorndale at length took his place in the train for Kingsley, he carried with him all the proper impedimenta of a young man of fortune, two well-filled portmanteaus, as many hat boxes, a thick travelling rug and so on, while his clothes bore the stamp of a first-rate tailor, and the plain cable chain which supported his watch was of real gold. He wanted nothing in his outward appearance to create a favourable impression; but it was to be questioned whether in his most anxious days in Ramden-road, he had ever felt more thoroughly depressed.

Quick to read between the lines, Ronald felt certain Lord and Lady Kingsley deplored his existence. There had not been one kindly message from the Marchioness, while, surely if her husband's letters to Mr. Grey had been of a pleasant character, one or two of them would have been offered for the perusal of the person they most concerned.

No; Ronald understood the position perfectly. Husband and wife were on the side of the nephew they had brought up from childhood. Too honourable not to yield the stranger his rights of birth, they yet intended to keep him outside the circle of their affection, and treat him with cold indifference.

They were prepared to see in Ronald not the child of a dearly loved brother, but the grandson of a former gamekeeper on their own estate.

"I'm bound to go to the Abbey," mused Ronald, drearily, "at least Mr. Grey seemed to think so; but if things are as I expect nothing will induce me to stay there. I'd rather go back to London and try for a City clerkship."

He stopped abruptly. Thought is free, and his had travelled back to the summer afternoon when he first saw Viola Orme.

He knew from Mr. Grey her country home was within a few miles of the Abbey, and that she was often with the Marchioness.

Now Ronald loved this girl he had seen but once—loved her with every fibre of his heart.

The only time she had spoken to him there had been a wide social gulf between them, and yet she had addressed him in tones of gentle courtesy.

Surely she would be kind to him now. Surely in the strange new life stretching out before him this beautiful creature would be as his guardian angel.

Ronald dreaded the meeting with his cousin Will. He had indeed no liking for that young man; but he was too generous not to feel for the deposed heir whose place he was to take; privately he thought it would have been a far better arrangement if Will had left the Abbey before his own arrival; but that, of course, was no affair of his.

They were nearly at the station. Ronald wondered if anyone from the Abbey had come to meet him. Such a kindly recognition of his kinship would have been strangely welcome, for the poor fellow began to be the prey to a terrible nervous depression.

He stepped on to the platform with a strange blank sense of disappointment, for no one was there who could possibly be waiting for him. A couple of farmers, one or two girls of the servant class, and a woman with two or three little children.

Most of these people were waiting for the train, not for the passengers in it, and when the engine started again Ronald found that he and one of the farmers—who had been joined by a buxom wife evidently just off a journey—were the only people left on the platform. He hesitated a little, and then lifting his hat asked—

"Could you tell me if it is far to Kingsley Abbey?"

"A matter of three miles," said the farmer,

cheerfully. "Lord Kingsley's dog-cart is outside, sir. I suppose the man was afraid to leave the mare and come on the platform. She's young and powerfully frisky."

At that minute a porter came up.

"For the Abbey, sir!" he inquired, respectfully. "I'll take the luggage out to the cart in a minute."

Until his acquaintance with Mr. Grey Ronald's journeys had been chiefly performed by train and bus. The old servant had a respectful fear of accidents, and never trusted himself in anything but a four-wheeled vehicle, from which it followed that Lord Kingsley's hair had never mounted a dog-cart in his life.

He did it now with the young mare dancing cheerfully on her hind legs, the front ones being raised playfully in mid-air, while the station-master himself hung on to her head by main force, and told the strange gentleman civilly he'd best be quick, as the mare was powerfully fussy. One spring and Ronald was in his seat by the groom's side; but as they started at a pace which seemed to him rather like flying through the air it did occur to Mr. Thorndale to wonder whether his cousin William had selected the animal sent to bring him home, and chosen the young mare out of malice.

(To be continued.)

WHICH IS THE HEIRESS?

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CHAPTER VI.

BEATRICE listened to every word Miss Daly uttered, like one in some horrible dream. A great, blinding mist came before her eyes, shutting out the pale white moonlight, the glimmering stars, and the green trees; a roar as of rushing waters filled her ears; her face grew white and cold as the face of the dead. She would have fallen, but for the desperate hold with which she clung to the wood-work of the window.

"I do not wonder that you are startled," continued Miss Daly; "the prospect before you, of winning or losing so much, would make anyone faint from apprehension."

Should she tell Miss Daly all that had happened? Her next words settled that question forever.

"There is another thing I must warn you about," she added, earnestly, as she laid her hand caressingly on the dark, curly head. "Be careful not to fall in love with anyone unless it is some one of whom Lord Pelham approves. You are inclined to be a little wilful and defiant, my darling; but never forget for a moment that one wrong step in this direction would cost you dear, for in his blind rage he would declare that to the best of his knowledge and belief you were not his rightful heiress, and then and there every farthing of his possessions would be made over to Heister Bray, and you would be turned away from his magnificent home—a beggar. Do you understand—do you realise the importance of what I am saying to you?"

"Yes," answered Beatrice, hoarsely; and the voice in which she uttered the word sounded like nothing human.

Miss Daly's words had decided her.

She would never tell any human being the story of her marriage—the marriage that was so hateful to her now, because of the accident that would render Donald Lindsey the most pitiful and helpless of cripples, should he live through the amputation.

The picture of him that rose before her mental vision made her almost reel with horror. She had fancied him—ay, rather liked him—in the old days; but that was when he was in possession of all his strength and beauty. But how could she fancy him as he would now be, until he dragged his weary life through to the end! The very thought of it made her shudder as though with a terrible chill.

Miss Daly had said they were to go away the

following morning. No one would know their destination. A startling thought came to her. If Donald Lindsey recovered he could never find her, he could never trace her. No one would ever know the tragedy of an hour that was concealed in her young life. She could never take a pitiful, helpless cripple to the proud old Lord Pelham, and say to him—

"I eloped with this man, and Heaven sent me a just punishment, which is to last me all my life through, in looking at him." No, no—a thousand times, no! If Donald Lindsey recovered he would have to go his way; she would go hers. She would never be wife to him; she would die first. So she settled the matter, and what came of it is the story we have to tell.

It was toward the close of the following afternoon. In a spacious apartment of a handsome villa were two persons—a handsome old gentleman, slightly bent by the weight of years, scrupulously elegant in regard to dress, and his servant, who had just placed a tray of refreshments before him.

"You may as well take them away again, Peters," said the old gentleman, rising from his chair and pacing restlessly to and fro the length of the apartment. "I cannot touch a single thing."

"If I might make so bold, I should like to urge you to at least try a glass of the wine, my lord," said the man earnestly, with the freedom of an old servant. "You have much to go through. It would give you a little strength."

"You forget my instructions, Peters," exclaimed the old gentleman, tersely. "I am to be known here simply as Mr. Pelham, a retired capitalist, not Lord Pelham, of Devonshire."

"Pardon me, I did forget, sir," murmured the old servant. "The habit of long years is strong, and clings to one."

"Draw back the curtains and let in more light," commanded Mr. Pelham. "I—I—feel as weak and nervous as a woman."

"I do not wonder, sir," answered Peters, sympathizingly.

"I do not know how I am to pass the time until five o'clock. You say the horses have already started for the station!"

"Some ten minutes ago, sir. It will take them twenty minutes more to reach the station. If the train arrives to time they will not have but a few minutes to remain there, and in half an hour after that they will be here."

Mr. Pelham crossed over to the little inlaid table, raised the glass of wine with a trembling hand to his lips, and drained its contents at a single draught.

"Peters," he said, turning around suddenly, "I want to make use of your judgment as well as my own in this matter. When these two young girls arrive with their chaperones I want you to look carefully in their faces and tell me, aside, which one you think is—is my granddaughter."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed the old servant, in terror, clasping his hands supplicatingly together, "ask anything else of me, and I will gladly do it, even to giving up my life, if need be; but, oh, sir, spare me from doing what you ask! I—I—might err in my judgment, sir. I might choose the wrong one. My opinion might influence yours, if I may be allowed to dare say so, and the result would be the vital mistake of robbing the true granddaughter of her birth-right. I would not dare make any choice between them."

"You have taught me, in your humble way, my own duty in this matter, Peters. I will guard against reaching a hasty conclusion. I will study them well—days, weeks, ay, long months, if necessary, before I decide the vital question which means joy for one young girl and bitter despair for the other. Heaven help me to make the right choice. I have been putting this matter off for so long, I have been dreading it so—"

He stopped short and looked out of the window, and his face wore an expression of great weariness—the weariness of a soul wearing itself away in bitter repining and disconsolate, unendurable pain.

"It is only half-past four," he said, glancing up at the clock on the mantelpiece, "and each hour of this day has seemed to me like an age. I am sure the clock is not right, Peters. You must have forgotten to wind it last night."

"It may be so, my lord—sir, I mean; but I hardly think it possible. Time always seems long when one is waiting under the stress of a great excitement."

"I have always heard and read that instinct teaches us which is our own," he replied. "I feel certain in my own mind I shall be able to tell at the first glance which is my son's child; but I shall make no comment. I shall not even give voice to my first impression."

For the twentieth time in as many minutes the old gentleman paused by the window, looking long and anxiously down the long sweep of road that lost itself in the distance.

"They must surely be here soon," he remarked. "I am sure it will not be long now, my lord—sir, I mean," stammered Peters.

"You must guard your tongue better than that, Peters," remarked the old gentleman. "I am not Lord Pelham here—plain Mr. Pelham."

"It was merely a slip of the tongue, sir; I shall be careful not to offend in like manner again. Had I not better go down to the gate to meet the young ladies and escort them to you?"

"Yes—yes, go," replied Mr. Pelham, "and let there be no delay in bringing them to me. I have always prided myself that no man living had better control of his nerves than I have; but I find I have changed of late. Give me another glass of wine, Peters."

The man quickly obeyed, and Lord Pelham raised the tiny goblet to his lips, draining its contents at a single draught. He watched Peters as he slowly quitted the room—listened as his slow footsteps died away in the corridor without, then resumed his seat, with what patience he could command, to await the coming of the two young girls, the presence of whom meant so much to him. Sigh after sigh broke from his lips, and he buried his face in his trembling hands.

"If I had not driven my only son from my home this state of affairs would not have happened," he muttered; "it is my retribution—retribution;" and something very like a tear coursed down the old furrowed cheek, and fell upon his clasped hands.

Drawing two envelopes from his pocket, he took from them slowly the two letters they had contained, and laying them side by side, looked long and earnestly through his glasses, first at one and then the other, though he knew the contents of both so well that he scarcely needed to look at the written words, for they were indelibly imprinted on his heart.

One was from Miss Daly, Beech Grove Cottage; the other was the last communication he would ever receive from Miss Bray, and had been posted a month before. His eye ran over Miss Bray's long letter, lingering over the postscript, which was as follows,—

"I feel most thankful to add, Lord Pelham, that the child you intrusted to my care has grown up to be a most beautiful young girl, fair, pure, and spotless as a lily, with a mind as true and tender as her face. Hester is a noble girl. Your heart will be sure to go out to her at first sight. I am proud to return to you your treasure. I hope you will find pardon for me for saying I cannot doubt her identity as your grand-daughter, for nobility of ancestry, blue blood, will tell, my lord."

Then he turned to Miss Daly's letter, and read the words,—

"Beatrice has grown up to be the most beautiful girl I have ever beheld—as gloriously beautiful as a dream. When you see her you will say no princess was more 'to the manner born.' Nobility always shows itself, my lord. Blue blood will tell."

Lord Pelham put down the letters, muttering—

"How strange it is in both of these letters should close with identically the same thought expressed!"

At that moment his reverie was suddenly cut short by the sound of carriage-wheels on the gravel road outside.

CHAPTER VII.

As the sound of carriage-wheels, for which he had listened so long—ah, so long!—greeted his ear a violent trembling seized him. He had tried to keep up his grand old dignity by appearing calm and collected, but in that instant it had ignominiously left him. The soul within him was stirred to its very depth. He sank back breathlessly in his chair and watched the door.

Would the young girl for whom he watched and waited with such intense suspense have his darling son's handsome, laughing, fun-loving face, dark dancing eyes, and winning smile?

The moments he waited seemed the length of eternity. At last he heard Peters' voice saying,—

"This way, if you please, ladies. You will find Mr. Pelham in here."

He heard light footsteps on the staircase, a swish of skirts in the corridor without; then Peters opened the door, and with a low, obsequious bow, bade the ladies enter.

For an instant the darkness of night seemed to fall like a dense cloud before the old gentleman's vision. When it cleared away he saw standing before him three persons, one of them a large, portly woman, and to the right of her two slim young girls.

Lord Pelham tried to rise from his seat, but his limbs failed him; he tried to speak, but no sound came from his lips.

Miss Daly saw his agitation and came nearer to him. He did not hear the first part of her sentence; he heard only the last words.

"These are the two young ladies, Lord Pelham. The one on the right is Beatrice; the young girl beside her is Hester Bray."

Lord Pelham raised his eyes, and with his whole soul concentrated in his gaze looked at the two maidens confronting him. At the first glance his eyes rested upon the dark, glowing, beautiful face of Beatrice. No wonder he started. He had seen many beautiful women, but never had he beheld a young girl so wondrously, dazzlingly beautiful.

Miss Daly noted his rapt gaze, and a flush of delight and satisfaction swept over her face. Then she saw him turn and look at Hester Bray, and the gaze was so penetrating, and lasted so long, that she felt uneasy.

He saw a slight, fair young creature robed in the deepest black, from which her white throat and fair face, framed in its mass of light, fluffy hair, rose like a flower.

"Come nearer and speak to me. I should like to hear your voices," he said, holding out his hands to them.

Both girls approached; a slim brown hand and a little white one simultaneously clasped his. Beatrice spoke first.

"You have a beautiful home, Lord Pelham," she said. "I am sure I shall like it here."

"I shall do everything in my power to make you happy," replied the old gentleman, regaining much of his former composure.

Then he turned to the fair young girl beside her.

"I am so glad to see you, sir!" said Hester, in a singularly clear, sweet, musical voice; and with those words she bent her fair, graceful head and impulsively laid her fresh, warm lips against the thin, wrinkled hand.

Lord Pelham clasped her hand warmly—the little fluttering hand that trembled like a frightened bird in his grasp.

"Heaven bless you for those words, my dear child!" he murmured, with emotion. "I am such a stern, hard old man, it has been long years since any one has told me spontaneously that they were glad to see me."

Again he looked long and earnestly into the beautiful, youthful face, as though he would look past them—look down into their very souls, and discover, if possible, which was the daughter of his banished son, handsome Hubert, and which the offspring of Mary Seymour.

"Leave me a little while to myself, my dears," he said, huskily. "Go out on the lawn until I send for you. I wish to talk to Miss Daly."

The two young girls obeyed. Together they left the room, and a moment later he saw them

standing together by the fountain on the green-ward below.

He was silent so long, and gazed at them so intently for such a long period, that Miss Daly said to herself that he must have quite forgotten her presence in the room.

"Lord Pelham," she said, at length breaking the oppressive silence, "you have now seen both of these young girls, may I dare hope you have reached—a conclusion?"

Lord Pelham turned sharply upon her. "I have got over making hasty decisions," he said. "Such an error has cost me already the sorrow of a life-time, madame. I shall take time and closer observation to justify my opinion."

The great coughing fit which seized him brought Peters quickly to his aide.

Miss Daly rose to her feet.

"The excitement through which you have just passed has disturbed you a trifle, I see, my lord. I will retire for the present, and when you wish to see me, I will be glad to come to you to tell you all about Beatrice," she said.

"I thank you for your consideration, madame," he responded. "I am a trifle shaken up, but not so much so but that I can listen calmly to all you have to say to me." Another fit of violent coughing interrupted him, and he sunk faintly back in his arm-chair, murmuring: "Let it be as you wish. I will talk with you later about the future of these two girls."

Miss Daly bowed and quitted the apartment.

Left to themselves, the old lord turned eagerly to the old servant, who had been his right hand, as it were, for over a quarter of a century, and pointed out toward the lawn:

"You have seen them, and—and you have made up your mind which is—is—" The words died away in an unintelligible whisper, but his eager eyes looked the question.

"Yes, my lord—Mr. Pelham, I mean," assented Peters; adding: "But I would rather die, sir, than divulge my belief; for I might be wrong, sir, in my choice. You know I might be wrong. I dare not voice my sentiments."

Meanwhile, the two young girls were busily engaged in inspecting the magnificent grounds that skirted Elm Villa, walking arm in arm together.

"What a grand old place!" cried Beatrice, delightedly. "It will be something like life living here. I shall be happy as the day is long. Won't you, Hester? It is like a bewildering dream."

"It is indeed very grand," assented fair, sweet Hester; "but for my part, I was happier with dear old aunt Bray, as I called her, in our cottage home; for I had some one to love me."

Beatrice shrugged her white shoulders.

"It is plain to see that of the two of us I am the real lady," she thought. "I have always had a longing for wealth and grandeur which was almost a mania—she is satisfied with humble surroundings."

After a moment's pause Beatrice asked, eagerly, "You speak of love as being necessary to your life, Hester. Do answer me this question, if—if you think it is not impertinent: Did you leave anyone behind you who cared for you when you came away?"

"Oh, no! no, indeed," returned Hester, flushing deeply. "I have never had a lover. I led too busy a life to even contemplate such a thing. I taught the village school for the last three years. Miss Bray begged me not to do so; but the children all loved me so well, and pleaded with her so hard to allow me to teach them that she at last consented, though with great reluctance. All the children in the village came down to the train with me to see me off, as well as all the young girls."

"You must have been greatly beloved," mused Beatrice. "As for me, girls of my own age are, for the most part, usually jealous of me."

"I shall never be, dear Beatrice," said Hester, throwing her soft white arms impulsively around her companion's neck.

"Not even if it should transpire that I, and not you, am the heiress over whom Lord Pelham is so anxious?"

"No, not even then," murmured Hester. "Miss Bray told me the whole story, of course."

I promised her if disappointment should be mine that I would bear it with fortitude, that I would go back and teach the village school again, and still find contentment in it."

"If I am decided to be Lord Pelham's heiress, and wish you to stay here as my companion, would you do it?" asked Beatrice.

"Yes," returned sweet Hester, without a moment's hesitation.

"We will seal that compact with a kiss," declared Beatrice, to which Hester readily agreed.

Their lips had barely met ere they heard the crashing of one of the huge limbs of the oak tree under which they stood, and at the same instant, ere they had time to utter a cry of fear, they were almost paralysed to see a young man drop from the tree, and for an instant lie half stunned at their feet.

But it was only for an instant, in the next he had sprung to his feet, and with a hearty laugh was bowing low before the astounded girls.

"I beg a thousand pardons, young ladies, for the fright I have occasioned," he said, in a rich, deep voice. "Pray allow me to explain the situation. I sprang up into the tree to cut a switch to use in place of my riding-whip, which I had unfortunately broken upon my fractious horse this morning. I had no sooner stepped out upon what I supposed was a safe bough than I saw you two approaching. I stood quite still, even when you stopped beneath the tree, lest I should frighten you. The pretty little *tableau* enacted before or beneath my eyes, rather, was too much for me. I leaned forward to get a better view and the bough broke, precipitating me at your feet. I take it for granted you are the two young ladies Lord Pelham was expecting to-day. Permit me to introduce myself. I am Lord Wyndham Powis, stopping for a few weeks at Elm Villa. I was travelling in this part of the country for pleasure, and by the merest chance met Lord Pelham yesterday, and allowed my father's dearest friend to urge me into accepting his hospitality, especially as I heard he was anxious to find amusement for the two young ladies he was expecting, and whose story he confided to me. Believe me," he added, with a rich, musical laugh, "I can be very amusing when I try," and his hazel brown eyes twinkled merrily.

Beatrice, the dark-eyed beauty, and sweet Hester, the fair-haired girl, looked into the handsome, laughing face of the young man, and from that moment life was never the same to them. Both girls blushed deeply and bowed, looked first at each other and then at the handsome stranger.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEATRICE was the first to speak. "You did startle us a little at first," she said, still smiling and blushing deeply. "Your introduction to us was certainly unique. We ought to be very glad of your presence at Elm Villa. It looked at first as though we were to be quite lonely here."

He looked eagerly at the fair-haired girl by her side. Hester had nothing to say. The timid blue eyes drooped shyly beneath his gaze; she seemed quite embarrassed.

"I shall like sweet Hester the better of the two," thought the handsome young lord.

They walked through the grounds, laughing and chatting. The sun was just setting when they started towards the house.

Each of the young girls had a suite of rooms of her own. Hester went to hers, but Beatrice remained in the porch. There Miss Daly found her when she went to look for her.

"I have been looking everywhere for you, Beatrice," she said. "You have barely time to dress for dinner."

But the girl did not seem to even hear her. She was watching the sunset with wistful, dreamy eyes.

"I see you have met Lord Powis," pursued Miss Daly, adding, "I consider that the greatest luck that could have happened, for he is one of the wealthiest noblemen in England. My dream would be realised if—he were to fall in love

with you, my darling, and ask you to be his wife."

Beatrice's face paled to the hue of death. The red roses which Wyndham Powis had gathered and placed in her hand fell suddenly from her grasp to the floor. Even her lips were ashen white. She thanked Heaven that Miss Daly's back was turned to her at that moment, and could not see her emotion.

"I would have known him at once, no matter where I had met him," pursued Miss Daly. "He has all the dark, handsome beauty of the Powis, and inherits all their characteristics—high-bred, proud, generous, impulsive, impatient of control, frank and independent. I should judge that, with those hazel-brown eyes, he is poetical and imaginative. What opinion have you formed of him, Beatrice?"

The girl started, her face flushed and paled; she leaned heavily against the marble pillar of the porch a moment ere she answered; then she said, slowly,—

"I have never met anyone like him before. He is the grandest, noblest young man that I have ever seen."

Miss Daly was well pleased with the answer she received.

"Wyndham Powis is the first young man whom she has been brought in contact with," she thought, "and it is a case of love at first sight. He could not help but be fascinated by Beatrice's brilliant beauty. A girl like Hester could never attract him."

Miss Daly remained at Elm Villa as chaperon to the two girls. This was hardly a wise choice, as the servants whispered among themselves, for they could all see how she favoured Beatrice; but of course that was natural.

In their hearts every one in the house, save Miss Daly, soon learned to love sweet Hester. Beatrice was an enigma to them. No princess of the royal blood could have been haughtier. She had not been used to servants, but she seemed to take naturally to ruling them. They all felt rather shy and ill at ease before the beautiful, brilliant girl, she looked at them so coldly from out of her proud, bright eyes; they were always uncomfortable under her inspection, while Hester always had a gentle, hopeful word, a kindly greeting for everyone alike, from the housekeeper to the shyest kitchen-maid. For this reason they quite adored the gentle girl, who always seemed so lonely amid her brilliant surroundings.

The two young girls were inseparable companions, and Miss Daly was pleased to note that Wyndham Powis was always with them.

Lord Pelham was always watching the trio anxiously when he thought he was not observed. Miss Daly would have given much to have had the key to his thoughts.

Lord Pelham did everything in his power to make the two young girls happy. Neither of them knew how to ride horseback. Lord Pelham said that was an accomplishment which every woman who lives in England should possess, so suitable horses were provided for them at once.

Beatrice's dark eyes danced with delight as she saw the beautiful habit of blue cloth, the velvet cap, with its waving plume, the gloves, the pearl-and-gold-mounted riding-whip. Everything was as perfect as it could be. She was anxious to take her first lesson in riding, especially since Wyndham Powis had announced that no one but himself must teach them to ride; but Hester hung back in affright.

"I am afraid I should spoil your pleasure. I am such a coward I am afraid of a horse," she declared.

But young Lord Powis declared they would not go without her. Beatrice was silent. At length Hester allowed herself to be persuaded into attempting it; but just as they were getting ready to mount, Lord Pelham, who was also to accompany them, was taken suddenly ill.

Beatrice's dark face flushed with keen disappointment.

"How provoking that he couldn't have kept up until we had started!" she remarked, vexedly; and looking into the beautiful, blooming face, she thought occurred to him that she was as heartless as she was beautiful. His musing was cut short by the sudden remark of Hester.

"You can go with Lord Powis, Beatrice, and I will remain to look after Lord Pelham. It—it would spoil the pleasure of my ride to—to think he might be suffering."

"We will all remain," said Wyndham Powis, quickly. "There are other days." But before he could dismount and assist Beatrice from her saddle, the mettlesome black horse upon which she sat was struck suddenly on the flank by a falling acorn. In an instant, quick as a flash, he made one flying leap through the open gate, and disappeared like a black streak down the country road.

Driving the spurs into his own spirited horse's side the young man followed in hot pursuit, calling back to Hester and Miss Daly not to alarm Lord Pelham about the matter, for he had the better horse of the two, and he would soon overtake Beatrice.

Beatrice had glanced back over her shoulder, and had seen Wyndham Powis start his horse in hot pursuit.

"What would he think, I wonder, if he knew this was but a ruse of mine to secure an hour's ride alone with him? It was a daring thought of mine, sticking the sharp point of the whip into his side as the acorn fell, to make him run away with me. I can manage him, however, when I want to. They little know that I have ridden many a time before, bareback at that. There isn't a horse living that could throw me."

She led Wyndham Powis a chase of fully five miles ere he overtook her. She would have made her horse go farther still, but that he stopped short from sheer exhaustion.

Wyndham Powis reached her side quickly, his own horse panting with the exertion.

"By Jove! you are a brave girl!" he cried, admiringly; "any other girl would have lost her head entirely if her horse ran away with her the first time she was ever in the saddle. I couldn't help but admire the way you sat the animal. You looked like a graceful young Amazon fairly born to the saddle."

Beatrice blushed deeply under his praise.

"Sometimes we learn by an accident that which might take us otherwise long years to accomplish," she declared; adding with a little rippling laugh: "I feel quite at home on horseback now, and I am sure I will greatly enjoy the homeward ride."

He looked at her amusedly. He had never seen such dauntless courage in a young girl's make-up.

"I think we had better turn now," he suggested. "You will be more than tired before you reach Elm Villa, I fancy."

But Beatrice would not hear of it.

"That would spoil the animal, to turn with him just where he has taken a notion to stop," she declared. "No; he must go a mile farther, at least."

"As the queen will," he said, laughingly, and with a profound bow.

They rode on together by the river-bank through the June sunshine an hour or more. It seemed to Beatrice but a few moments, and yet what a change had been wrought in the time! Almost unconsciously to her the whole world had changed for her; her life had suddenly grown complete. It seemed to Beatrice as though the air throbbled; her heart beat fast, her hands trembled. All the rest of the world had fallen from her. But a little while before her heart had been desolate.

Despite the brilliancy with which she had been surrounded, there was a sense of chill and loneliness, of unrealised wishes, of vague hopes, of ungratified desires—a sense of emptiness of all things. It had vanished as snow before the sun, and a sweet harmonious sense of the fulness of life had taken possession of her. Every love story has a different commencement. This was how Beatrice's earthly paradise began. Heaven was kind to her that no warning came of how easily it was to end. It seemed to the girl that she was in a new world; the spell that was falling upon her was new to her. In no way did it recall that other girlish fancy which had come to such a disastrous finale.

Never once did she remember the hidden skeleton; never once did her dark, terrible

secret come before her; never once did she pause to think, except to say to herself, just once, that she had never loved that other one from whom she had fled in such terror when affliction and blight fell upon him. She deluded herself with the belief that he had died of his injuries. That is what the doctors said would surely happen. She put the thought of him from her with a shudder. She had met the one being in all the whole world who made her life complete. Why torture herself by giving one thought to the past? She shut it out from her as one puts away from one's memory some horrible dream.

As they rode along through the sweet-scented, golden June sunshine Wyndham Powis watched her beautiful face curiously, wondering of what she was thinking with that rapt, dreamy expression upon her face.

He broke the spell by saying suddenly,—"I wish Miss Hester were with us, the scenery is so lovely."

The glad, happy look died out of her eyes. "Why must he bring me from heaven to earth again in that manner!" she asked herself, choking back a heavy sigh.

As she made to answer he did not resume the tenor of his thoughts; but he did not forget Hester—sweet, fair Hester—who was so different from the dark, sparkling girl who rode by his side.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN they reached Elm Villa they found Hester reading to Lord Pelham in the porch. She laid down her book and looked up with a smile as they approached.

"Oh, we have had such a delightful ride!" cried Beatrice, throwing herself down on a rustic seat and removing her broad straw hat, with which she fanned herself vigorously.

Wyndham Powis crossed over to Lord Pelham. "How are you feeling now, sir?" he asked, anxiously. "I felt sorry to leave you so abruptly just as you were taken ill; but the circumstance under which I went off must be my excuse."

Lord Pelham could not help but notice Beatrice's want of interest in the subject, and he sighed deeply, wishing with all his soul that she had been more like sweet Hester.

"It was only a momentary faintness," he explained, adding, "Thanks to this dear little girl Hester, I recovered rapidly. I have been under her especial care since, and she has talked to me so brightly, so sympathetically and sweetly, and beguiled me so completely that I have quite forgotten I am an old man full of aches and ills."

Hester looked at him with happy, earnest eyes. Beatrice shrugged her shoulders. She hated to have the happiness of her day spoiled by hearing of the aches and ills of a querulous old man.

"You missed a fine ride," said Wyndham Powis to Hester, when he found himself quite alone with her a few moments later.

"I had a very happy time here," said Hester. "It was a pleasure for me to minister to the comfort of Lord Pelham—or rather Mr. Pelham, as he wishes to be called. I quite forgot time in his company. What a noble old gentleman he is!" she went on enthusiastically. "What a noble face he has! What a grand, chivalrous manner!"

"If he were younger I would think you were falling in love with his lordship," laughed Wyndham Powis.

Hester smiled and blushed. "I do think a great deal of him," she acknowledged, bashfully. "I have never seen any one like him. He is my ideal of a grand, courtly old gentleman."

Wyndham Powis could not help but wish that he had made an impression one half as good upon the mind of sweet Hester.

During the weeks which followed there was no end of guests at Elm Villa. No day passed without some amusement. Grand parties were given to which the *élite* of the country were invited. Archery meetings, croquet-parties were held in the grounds. Riding-parties were formed to visit the sights of the adjoining country places. Picnics were arranged.

Mr. Pelham looked on, still regarding the two young girls with intense earnestness. One day Miss Daly made a remark which troubled him sorely. "They had been watching the two girls strolling over the lawn with Wyndham Powis in silence for some time, when Mr. Pelham said thoughtfully,—

"I have never seen two young creatures so thoroughly happy. It is a great delight to me. Is it not a pleasure to you to watch them in their frolics?"

"Yes—and no," returned Miss Daly, in a low hesitating voice.

"Your answer surprises me," said the old gentleman. His curiosity seemed to get the better of him, for he added,— "Why should you look with reluctant eyes upon their happiness?"

"May I speak just what I think, sir?" asked Miss Daly.

"Certainly," he responded. "I expect you to be frank with me."

Thus assured, the lady said, slowly,—

"Seeing so much of life, its gaieties, its pleasures, is all very well for the young girl whom you will make your heiress; but Heaven help the girl, whichever one of them it may be, who is doomed to go back to poverty, after having seen so much of wealth and luxury! Her whole future life will be embittered by the remembrance of the past, and by brooding over what she has lost—what might have been. Ah, Lord Pelham, I am sure you never thought of that when you placed these two young girls side by side."

He started violently. Such an idea as she had expressed had never occurred to him; the matter had never appeared to him in that light.

(To be continued.)

THE MASTER OF DRUNGADHEN.

(Continued from page 440.)

The last sentence recalled to Mrs. Bland's mind her neglected duties at home; and, regardless of Miss Constance's commands that she should remain until their return, she gave the sleeping infant to nurse, and telling her to say she was called away, prepared to accompany Mary, to whom, during their walk homewards, she communicated the fact that Arthur had been discovered to be a lord, that he never was any more than a nurse child of hers; and Mary, in her curiosity to learn more, for about the first time in her life played the part of listener.

And Lady Howard lay, praying in her last moments for forgiveness for the wrong she had done. She had been very quiet since the previous day, when Lady D'Almaine had quitted her bedside, but her strength was fast passing away, and she knew she had but a short time to live.

She had just awakened from a peaceful sleep when the nurse, bending over her, asked if she would like to see the lady who called yesterday, as she was here; and she giving her assent, Lady D'Almaine entered the room.

"Florence," said the latter, as she bent over the dying woman, "I have brought someone to see you—someone who wants you to forgive her, and kiss her before you go. Can you guess who it is?"

"Edna, is it Edna?" she asked, as for a moment a flush arose to her pallid cheek. "I should like to bid her good-bye."

"Oh! mamma, dear mamma!" cried the girl, as with Lady D'Almaine she now approached the bedside; "can you look on me again after my wicked and cruel conduct?"

"My child!" said Lady Howard, as she felt the girl's tears on her face, "don't cry. Would to Heaven I had no more to answer for than you have; but I think I always did my duty towards you; and Eddy, dear, I had hoped you had given me a little of the love I felt for you. When I spoke, darling, on the night you left my roof it was for your good, but you did not think so;

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and, Eddy," she continued, as her words came slow and faint, "are you happy? Tell me that, dear—tell me that!"

"Happy! yes, mother dear," she answered, "was it not to find you like this," and she buried her face in her hands as she knelt beside the bed of death.

"Florence," asked Lady D'Almaine, as the breath of the dying woman became more difficult to draw, "would it make you happy to know that Eddy's husband is a gentleman? that he is, indeed, worthy of your daughter's hand, that he is—"

"Say quickly—quickly!" she cried, "tell me it is," a momentary excitement giving her voice renewed strength, as raising herself she asked, "is it—Arthur Bland?"

"It is," replied Lady D'Almaine. "Arthur Bland, now Cecil Lord D'Almaine."

"Heaven be praised!" and for some moments the thin, white hands were crossed in prayer, the eyelids once more closed as if in peaceful slumber. Lady Florence Howard was dead!

CHAPTER X.

A LARGE uncarpeted room on the first floor of the "Bishop's Mitre," a house greatly frequented by the composers in the neighbourhood, was now the scene of great hilarity, as around the long table, running down the centre, were assembled several men, who evidently had met with the intention of thoroughly enjoying themselves.

The spread was liberal, and the numerous bottles discredited any idea that a stranger might form of its being a temperance meeting.

The rattle of knives and forks at length gave place to the jingle of glasses, only, excepting for the occasional cracking of nuts, which, like small popguns, varied the monotony of sound; and as the last waiter left the room one of the company arose to propose a toast.

"I call upon you, gentlemen," said the speaker, in whose voice one could not mistake the tone of Hobbs, "to fill your glasses, and drink with three times three the toast I am about to propose—a toast, gentlemen, to which I feel sure every feeling within you, every heart which beats here to-night will proudly re-echo—the health and long life of our noble pal, if I may make so bold as still to call him a pal, the happiness and prosperity of one who has left us, but to appear at times, as the sun in an English winter, but whose bright face will, I am convinced, be ever present in our minds, whilst his many kindly actions have endeared him to all. Doubtless, gentlemen" (here the speaker wiped a profuse perspiration from his brow), "you can guess to whom I allude, as I request you once again to fill your glasses, and drink with three times three to the health of Gentleman George, Cecil Lord D'Almaine."

And as Hobbs sat down, amidst the jingling of glasses, and the hurrahs which followed this speech, he almost fainted with the effort it had cost him, and his pale thought nothing less than the unusual event of being called upon to propose the health of a live lord could have moved Hobbs to open his lips without a grumble.

And as Arthur rose to return thanks, his voice was drowned in the cheers that followed, until a cry of order from an invisible party gained him a hearing.

It was Harris, who had filled and refilled his glass, until, with same in hand, he had gradually slid under the table, where he was telling an imaginary companion that he always said "Shentleman—Sheorge" was a brick; and as Lord D'Almaine rose to return thanks, the cheers that greeted him for the moment drowned his voice; but at last obtaining a hearing, he told them that at no time of his life had he felt so proud as then; that, notwithstanding the change which had taken place, he should ever remember with pleasure the many hours he had passed in their society; and he trusted that neither the wealth nor position to which he had acceded would cause him to forget or be forgotten. He hoped, in commemoration of the good fortune

which had befallen him, that each year he should have the pleasure of meeting the same faces around the same table, where he hoped to have the happiness of presiding at the dinner he should provide on the anniversary of the same.

"Hear, hear!" said Harris, scrambling to his chair, where he sat with his hands thrust deep in his pockets, and his chin resting on his breast, as his lordship continued,—

"Doubtless the change in circumstances will, as you are fully aware, prevent the close friendship which has existed between us, but I shall never forget you, and that you may remember me long after the room in which we now all are shall be wrapped in darkness. I give this as a token of the esteem in which you are held by 'Gentleman George';" and begging their acceptance of a cheque for £100, which he placed on the table, Lord D'Almaine reseated himself amid the deafening cheers of those present.

It was late before the party broke up; it was with difficulty that Harris was made to comprehend the good fortune that had befallen him through the beneficence of his old pal; but, as previous to his departure, Lord D'Almaine proposed refilling of glasses, he began to rouse to his situation, and was heard to join in the chorus of "He's a jolly good fellow!" as the latter entered the carriage which was to convey him homewards.

"Up still, Eddy!" he said, as entering the drawing-room at Chester-place, where they had resided since the death of Lady Howard, he found his wife engrossed in reading the evening paper; "you must be tired!"

"Not very, dear," she replied; "I was so interested in the account here of Constance's wedding;" and she showed her husband the paragraph in which was mentioned the marriage that day of Captain Horace Mountrevor to Constance Aubrey, with a full description of the bride's attire, and that of the bridesmaids; for Horace, whose claim to the Drungadhen estate ceased when Arthur's identity had been proved, preferred to retain the name by which he had always been known.

The Dowager Lady D'Almaine became, at her niece's request, an inmate of their home on their return from their honeymoon, and she often reminds Horace that he did not begin for finding her son he would have been master of Drungadhen; but he, with the others, often enjoys the hospitality of the castle, within the walls of which may be heard the merry voices of children when they all assembled in the old place.

Nor has Martha Bland been forgotten. Once more reinstated in the same nursery from which, in years gone by, she fled with the infant Cecil, she now reigns supreme, surrounded by the little ones, happier far than in the days of Lupus-street, the right in which she disposed of for £500, including furniture, lodgers, piano, violin, even to the crying baby, which she confided to Mary, who was taken on at her recommendation as housemaid at the castle—was giving it away. And whenever that young lady would go to her with complaints, Martha would say to her, as Lady Howard had said to her, every cloud has a silver lining.

[THE END.]

THE most unhealthy city in Europe is Barcelona, Spain. The number of deaths there at present exceeds the number of births.

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FACETIÆ.

"FRITZ, what are you doing there?" said the mother to her boy sliding down the baulsters. "Making trousers for orphans," said Fritz.

LADY (engaging a servant): "We are all total abstainers, but I suppose you don't mind that?" Servant: "Oh, no, mum. I've been in a reformed drunkard's family before."

"DONOTHY always begins a novel in the middle." "What's that for?" "Why, then she has two problems to get excited over—how the story will end, and how it will begin."

JACK: "I say, Marie, if thirty-two degrees is the freezing point I wonder what the squeaking point is!" Marie: "I don't know, Jack; possibly two in the shade."

PILNEY: "And because you couldn't find a penny to pay the fare did the conductor make you get off and walk?" Jayson: "No, he only made me get off. I could have sat on the road if I'd wanted to."

"PAY your fare or get off!" said the tramcar-conductor. "What do you take me for?" asked the dignified individual. "Twopence all the way, same as anybody else," answered the conductor.

A CLASS in grammar was reciting, and one of the younger boys was asked to compare "sick." He began, thoughtfully: "Sick"—paused while his brain struggled with the problem—then finished, triumphantly, "Sick, worse, dead."

MRS. GADD (who spent last summer on her aunt's farm): "I did not meet you at any of the summer resorts, Mrs. Gabb." Mrs. Gabb (who summered on her uncle's farm): "No-o; and, by the way, I don't remember meeting you in Paris."

EDITOR: "Mr. Paragraph, I wish you wouldn't write so many jokes about men who can't pay their bills; they are funny enough in a way, but so many of them are a little monotonous. Can't you get your mind on some other subject?" Mr. Paragraph (thoughtfully): "Perhaps I could—if I had a little larger salary."

HELEN: "So he has proposed at last! How did it happen?" Maude: "I told him that I was going to be married." Helen: "Really?" Maude: "Yes, and it aroused him instantly. He actually raved. And so I took pity on him, and we are engaged." Helen: "But you told him a fib." Maude: "Not at all. When I said I was going to be married I meant to him."

WASHDAY: "Bridget, did you put the clothes in soak?" "O! did not. Did you want me to?" "Why, certainly." "Very well, mum." Two hours later—"O! put 'em in soak, mum, but the parrot-nose av a pawnbroker wud give me only eight shillings on the whole outfit. Here be the money, mum, an' it's sorry O! am that ye bees so harrud up."

A BRIGHT little girl, returning from school, was asked by her father what she had been learning that morning. "All of us been learning to spell," she said. "What did you learn to spell?" "Learned to spell rat." "Well, how do you spell rat?" "R A T—rat." "Now, how do you spell mouse?" "Just the same, only in little smaller letters," said the little maid.

"MR. SCRIMPUS," said the magnate to the young barrister, "I want to make use of your valuable services." "Very well, sir," said Scrimpus, as he gasped at the joyous prospect of a first brief. "What can I do for you?" "A firm which competes with my house," replied the magnate, firmly, "is about to bring an action for damages against me, and I want you to get them to engage you as their counsel."

ONE of the ladies in fancy dress was, though fair enough, a trifle fat, and we will not say that she did not look well out of the thirties. And there spoke to her a reporter: "May I ask what character you represent?" "Helen of Troy," she answered. "What did you think it was?" "Well," he murmured, ungallantly enough, as weights and measures confused his brain, and he gazed on her ample proportions, "I thought you might be Helen of Avoirdupois!"

AUNT JANE was a gossip. We knew that; but we were a little surprised one day when Margie, who had just been clad in a new dress, announced her intention of visiting her. "Why do you wish to see Aunt Jane, dear?" "Oh, tause I's got a new dress." "I don't think Aunt Jane cares," said mamma. "Yeth, but I want her t' thee it, tause sen ev'ybody'll know I's dot it."

HE drew her toward him, and after a few brief moments of kisses and rapture of various kinds, he asked: "What kind of an engagement ring would you prefer?" She looked shyly into his face, and declined to express a preference until she had been further pressed. Then she said: "Well, I've been accustomed to—" She checked herself just in time to prevent a dreadful *four pas*, or some other frightful French thing. However, she is still pondering her answer, and it troubles him mightily.

THEY stood looking at the man who had been pointed out to them as a popular writer. "Did you ever see any of his work?" asked the one in blue, finally. "Oh, yes," answered the one in grey. "Then you must know something about him," suggested the one in blue. "I do," returned the one in grey. "He's one of that class of writers that make women 'gurgel' when they talk." "Let's kill him," said the one in blue. But they were afraid of soiling their clothes. And, besides, he wasn't worth the exertion.

IN a small town in North Wales the town clerk and a local auctioneer met in a public-house. They were having a quiet chat, when the auctioneer espied Pat pass by. Thinking he could have a joke at Pat's expense, he called him, and said: "They tell me you are good at conundrums." "Shure, I'll have a flop at one," said Pat. "Can you tell me," said the auctioneer, "how there are so many more donkeys in Egypt than in Wales?" "I can easily answer that, sir," said Pat. "In Egypt they let them be donkeys for ever, while in Wales they make auctioneers out of them." Collapse of auctioneer.



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Directions.—Rearrange the above to represent eight well-known towns. Copy these you find out on a sheet of paper, placing the respective number to each, and post it together with your order for TWANGLES and remittance (P.O. for 2s. or 25 Stamps), and a stamped addressed reply envelope for result, &c., to

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NOTICE.—The £120 is offered to purchasers of the puzzle until the end of February, 1897, and orders from those taking part in the contest should be sent in as early as possible, but not later than Saturday, February 27th, 1897, when the awards will be made, the prizes despatched, and the result communicated to all competitors by Monday, March 1st, 1897.

If you cannot solve all the puzzles, do as many as you can, as the prizes will be awarded in order of correctness, and in cases of equality will be added together and divided; thus a prize is ensured to every person sending in all eight solutions correct.

TWANGLES will be sent to purchasers per return, together with a notice informing competitors whether their solutions are correct or not.

The Prizes are large, and well worth trying for, and as a guarantee of good faith any purchaser is invited to call and see the prize money sent out.

SOCIETY.

THE Prince of Wales is to hold the first Levée this season on behalf of Her Majesty at St. James's Palace on February 26th, following the Queen's Drawing Room at Buckingham Palace on February 21st.

THE Queen's diamond jubilee year will very likely be marked by a Royal marriage in which Her Majesty will take a deep and affectionate interest, being deeply attached to both the young people.

THREE Royal personages will complete their eightieth year. If spared, during 1897—the Princess Clementina of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha on June 3rd, the Grand Duke of Luxembourg on July 24th, and the Queen of Denmark on September 7th.

THE Empress Frederick will stay with Her Majesty until close upon the departure of the Court for Cimiez. The Excelsior Hotel, which has been secured for Her Majesty's accommodation, will be carefully freed from all risk of damp previous to the Queen's occupation of it.

THE Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse will be the guests of the Emperor and Empress of Russia for several weeks. The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess are to spend the months of June and July in England, and at Whitinside they will be the guests of the Queen at Balmoral.

MUCH interest attaches to the event which in the spring will rob Prince Albert of York of the proud position he now occupies in the nursery at York House. For if, as is hoped, the new comer is a princess, she will, of course, bear the name which a few weeks later will be joyously echoed, not only from end to end of the Queen's dominions, but throughout all the civilized world.

THE Queen is to return to Windsor Castle from Osborne on Tuesday, the 16th, and will leave for the Riviera either on the afternoon of Monday, March 8th, or the morning of Tuesday, March 9th. Her Majesty is to travel by the same route as last year, crossing the Channel from Portsmouth in the *Victoria and Albert* to Cherbourg, and proceeding thence direct to Nice by special train.

It is understood that the Queen has settled the Balmoral domain so that it will pass with the Crown, Her Majesty being desirous that this place should become the Scotch residence of all future sovereigns. The Castle has been over and over again enlarged with a view to its affording adequate accommodation for any Court. The old house of Balmoral, which was pulled down about 1855, had been altered and enlarged by Sir Robert Gordon (who leased the place for many years) and it was considered to be one of the best examples of the true Scottish baronial style in the Highlands.

THE marriage of the Duchess Elsa of Wurtemberg, one of the twin-daughters of the Grand Duchess Vera (daughter of the Grand Duke Constantine Nicolaievitch and sister of the Queen of the Hellenes) and the late Duke Eugene, of Prince Albert of Schaumburg-Lippe is to take place at Stuttgart on Saturday, May 8th. The Duchess Elsa and her sister, the Duchess Olga, are the heiresses of the immense fortune of their great-aunt, the late Queen Olga, and they will also inherit largely from their mother. Prince Albert is a brother of the Queen of Wurtemberg and of the Princess of Waldeck-Pyrmont, and his eldest brother, Prince Frederick, was married last year to Princess Louise of Denmark, eldest daughter of the Crown Prince. Prince Albert is a son of Prince William of Schaumburg-Lippe, one of the great territorial magnates of Bohemia, and his mother is a first cousin of the Princess of Wales.

THE Queen, who is anxious to have a meeting with the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland, during her stay at Cimiez, intends to invite them to come to England as her guests for the festivities of June next.

STATISTICS.

ABOUT 2,000 soldiers are discharged yearly for bad conduct.

THERE are more than 50,000 people of Welsh birth in London.

THE land covered by new houses in Greater London every year is 1,163 acres.

THE annual taxes of the world aggregate the enormous sum of £1,087,500,000.

THE medical department of the Queen's Household costs £2,700 yearly, and comprises 24 persons.

THE highest inhabited building in Europe is the Alpine clubhouse on Monte Rosa—12,000 feet above the sea level.

GEMS.

CULTIVATE the habit of always seeing the best in people, and, more than that, of drawing forth whatever is best in them.

REJOICE in the joy of life. Be touched with tenderness and sympathy for all this life that can feel and can suffer, and do not dare to add a pang to the burden of the world's sorrow.

EXAMINE your words well and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth even about your own immediate feelings—much harder than to say something fine about them which is not the exact truth.

THE grumbler should have a corner to himself, and not burden others with his complaints. He spoils the companionship of life, and deserves no public recognition. There is too much to enjoy and too much to do to waste time upon the querulous and the fault-finding. Sunshine is what society needs, and the more we put it into speech, manner and deed, the sweeter and more inspiring becomes our association and influence.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

RICE PUDDING WITH FRUIT.—Swell the rice with a very little milk over the fire; then mix fruit of any kind with it, currants, gooseberries scalded, pared and quartered apples, raisins, or black currants, and, still better, red currant jelly, with one egg to bind the rice; boil it well, and serve with powdered cinnamon and sugar.

FLOATS.—Break the whites of six eggs into a flat dish, beating as for icing; add a tablespoonful of pounded loaf-sugar for each egg. When quite stiff beat into it a tablespoonful (or more, according to taste) of currant, strawberry, or any other fruit jelly. Pour cream into saucers and drop the float on it.

A MACARONI SOUP.—This is an inexpensive and nourishing soup, can be prepared at short notice. Boil some macaroni for twenty minutes in slightly salted water, then strain it and add it to three pints of stock nicely flavoured with vegetables. Season with pepper and salt and serve. Hand a little grated Parmesan cheese with this soup.

CHARLOTTE RUSSE.—Two tablespoonfuls gelatine, five tablespoonfuls of sugar, three of brandy, three-quarters of a pint of cream—very cold—and whites of two eggs. Add the beaten whites of the eggs to the whipped cream, then the brandy and sugar. When the gelatine is lukewarm, beat it light, then add gradually cream and eggs.

DROP SPONGE-CAKES.—One-half pound of powdered sugar, quarter of a pound of flour, four eggs—yolks and whites beaten separately and very stiff; one lemon—all the juice and half the grated rind. Drop upon buttered paper, not too near together. Try one, and if it runs, beat the mixture some minutes longer hard, adding a very little flour. The oven should be very quick.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Yellow River is styled the "Sorrow of China." It is estimated that its floods in the present century have cost China eleven million lives.

THE wild tribes of the Caucasus, Russia, teach their children the use of the dagger as soon as the youngsters are able to walk. They are first taught to stab water without making a splash.

THE Mosque of St. Sophia, at Constantinople, was built over a thousand years ago, and the mortar used is said to have been perfumed with musk. The musky odour is still perceptible.

It is thought that the Princess of Wales will go to Cannes after the second pre-Easter Drawing Room, accompanied by Princess Victoria. Her Royal Highness would be the guest of the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland at Cannes.

THE largest library in the world is the National Library of France, founded by Louis XIV., and which contains 1,400,000 books, 300,000 pamphlets, 175,000 manuscripts, 300,000 maps and charts, 150,000 coins and gold medals, 1,300,000 engravings, and 100,000 portraits.

A NOVEL portable electric lamp has been invented which finds a great demand in mines, and for the use of firemen and workers in gasworks, gunpowder, and chemical factories. It burns several hours, can be readily charged, is light, and comparatively inexpensive.

SOME surprising things were found in the booty captured from the Derivishes by the British at Dongola. Among them were a few coats of mail and helmets which evidently date from the days of the Crusades. A sword which was found had an inscription in old French. Another sword bore the motto, "Honi soit qui mal y pense." There were also a number of double-barrelled sporting guns, and one rifle of immense calibre, firing a 1lb. ball and requiring two men to hold it.

SLIGHT and delicate girls and children should be encouraged to sing. The lungs and heart are directly strengthened by this exercise. Germans are seldom consumptive. It is asserted by many medical men that this fact is due to the amount of vocal exercise which enters into every child's education. Singing has also a wonderful power of lightening depression and fits of "nerves." Persons who suffer from sleeplessness will find that some portion of the evening spent in singing is amply repaid by a night of sound sleep. Never sing when the system requires food. About half an hour after the evening meal is the best time for this purpose.

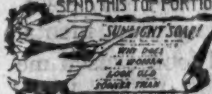
IN Japan the nose is the only feature which attracts attention. The nose determines the beauty or ugliness of the face, according as it is big or small. This is probably due to the fact that difference in noses constitutes about the only distinction between one Japanese face and another. The eyes are invariably black, the cheek-bones high, and the chin receding. In Japan a lady who has a huge proboscis is always a great beauty and a reigning belle. There are few large noses among the natives, and lucky is he or she upon whom nature lavishes one. In all Japanese pictures representing the supposedly beautiful woman the artist invariably improves on nature by depicting this feature as abnormally developed.

FRENCH experimenters have lately brought out interesting facts about the circulation of air in the soil. It appears that considerable oxygen is absorbed by the roots of plants, and the supply of this oxygen is maintained by air penetrating through the minute interstices of the soil. When the ground is covered with water, or when the molecules, or grains, of soil are dissolved in water and packed into an immense mass, then air cannot circulate below the surface, and vegetation suffers. The experiments referred to show that time or salt in the soil solidify the earthy molecules and prevent their being dissolved and packed by the action of water; hence the importance of lime in keeping the ground open and permeable for the circulation of both air and rain water.



SUNLIGHT & LIFEBOUY SOAP COMPETITIONS

SEND THIS TOP PORTION The first of these Monthly Competitions will be held January 30th, 1897, to be followed by others each month during 1897. Competitors sending in the most Coupons win the best Prizes, but every Competitor sending in not less than 50 Sunlight or 50 Lifebuoy Coupons wins a Prize.



RULES.

1. Competitors may enter EACH or EVERY MONTH for EITHER or BOTH "Sunlight" or "Lifebuoy" Competitions, but must send in the "Sunlight" or "Lifebuoy" Coupons in SEPARATE PACKETS, carefully marked on the outside of the postal wrapper "SUNLIGHT" or "LIFEBOUY."

2. For this Competition the United Kingdom will be divided into 7 Districts, and the Prizes will be awarded every month during 1897, in each of the 7 Districts as stated below.

3. Competitors to send in many "SUNLIGHT SOAP" or "LIFEBOUY SOAP" Wrappers as they may collect. Cut off the top portion of each wrapper—that portion containing the heading "SUNLIGHT SOAP" or "LIFEBOUY SOAP." Enclose with these (called "Coupons") a sheet of paper stating Competitor's full name and address, and the number of Coupons sent in, and forward same (see Rule 3) postage paid to Lever Brothers, Limited, Port Sunlight, near Birkenhead, marked on the postal

£66,156.0.0
in PRIZES of
**CASH, BICYCLES,*
WATCHES, & BOOKS**
GIVEN FREE
For Sunlight and Lifebuoy
Soap Wrappers.

wrapper (top left-hand corner) with the NUMBER of the DISTRICT Competitor lives in, and the word "SUNLIGHT" or "LIFEBOUY," whichever Coupons the packet contains. Do not send an advice of Coupon in a separate letter.

4. The Competition will CLOSE the LAST DAY OF EACH MONTH. Coupons received too late for one month's Competition will be put into the next. All parcels on which postage has not been fully paid WILL BE REFUSED.

5. Competitors who obtain wrappers from unsold soap in dealers' stock will be disqualified. Employees of Lever Brothers, Limited, and their families are debarred from competing.

6. A printed list of Winners in Competitor's district will be forwarded to Competitors in about 3 weeks after each Monthly Competition closes.

7. Lever Brothers, Limited, will endeavour to award the Prizes fairly to the best of their ability and judgment, but it is understood that ALL WHO COMPETE AGREE TO ACCEPT THE AWARD of Lever Brothers, Limited, as final.

LEVER BROTHERS, Limited, Port Sunlight, near Birkenhead.

PRIZES FOR SUNLIGHT COUPONS.

The 1 Competitor in each District who sends in the largest number of Sunlight Coupons from the District in which he or she resides, will receive **£21 cash**

The 10 Competitors in each District who send in the next largest number will each receive, carriage paid, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gentleman's "Premier" Bicycle, with Pumps Pneumatic Tyres, price **£21**

The 40 Competitors in each District who send in the next largest number will each receive, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gentleman's Rolled Gold Watch, price **£4 4s.**

The remaining Sunlight Competitors will each receive Cloth-bound Books, by Popular Authors, in the proportion of 1 Book for every 50 Sunlight Coupons sent in

Total Prizes for Sunlight Coupons during 1897

PRIZES FOR LIFEBOUY COUPONS.

The 1 Competitor in each District who sends in the largest number of Lifebuoy Coupons from the District in which he or she resides, will receive **£21 cash**

The 5 Competitors in each District who send in the next largest number will each receive, carriage paid, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gentleman's "Premier" Bicycle, with Pumps Pneumatic Tyres, price **£21**

The 20 Competitors in each District who send in the next largest number will each receive, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gentleman's Rolled Gold Watch, price **£4 4s.**

The remaining Lifebuoy Competitors will each receive Cloth-bound Books, by Popular Authors, in the proportion of 1 Book for every 50 Lifebuoy Coupons sent in

Total Prizes for Lifebuoy Coupons during 1897

GRAND TOTAL of all Prizes given for Sunlight and Lifebuoy Coupons, 1897

Total Prizes in all Districts during 1897.

£1,764 0 0

17,640 0 0

14,112 0 0

10,000 0 0

£43,516 0 0

1,764 0 0

8,820 0 0

7,056 0 0

5,000 0 0

22,640 0 0

£66,156 0 0

No. of District	NAME OF DISTRICT.
1	IRELAND.
2	SCOTLAND.
3	LONDON, MIDDLESEX, WEST, SURREY.
4	WALES, LANCASHIRE, CHESHIRE.
5	NORTHUMBERLAND, DURHAM, WEST-MORELAND, CUMBERLAND, YORKSHIRE, ISLE OF MAN.
6	SHROPSHIRE, HEREFORDSHIRE, MONMOUTHSHIRE, STAFFORDSHIRE, WORCESTERSHIRE, WARWICKSHIRE, DEVONSHIRE, LEICESTERSHIRE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, OXFORDSHIRE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, BERKSHIRE, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, RUTLANDSHIRE, LINCOLNSHIRE, HUNTINGDONSHIRE.
7	NORFOLK, SUFFOLK, ESSEX, CAMBRIDGESHIRE, BEDFORDSHIRE, HERTFORDSHIRE, SUSSEX, HAMPSHIRE, ISLE OF WIGHT, CHANNEL ISLANDS, WILTSHIRE, DORSETSHIRE, SOMERSETSHIRE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, DEVONSHIRE, CORNWALL.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

C. B.—Common salt will answer.

IMPATIENCE.—There is usually some delay.

ANXIETY.—He would be liable to punishment.

TRIOUBLED.—You had better make a searching inquiry.

WALLY.—Strong coffee is often recommended as a substitute.

STUDENT.—You can easily secure the work through a bookseller.

TILLIE.—Any bookseller would supply it if you gave the order.

FLORIST.—No perfectly black flower has ever yet been produced.

WORRIED MAN.—If he continues to annoy you make complaint to your relatives.

BOB.—See advertisements relative to your query in the daily papers.

IMPUDENT.—Impossible for you to obtain authority to search his premises.

CURIOUSITY.—A Moslem or Musselman is a believer in the doctrines of Mohammed.

ALGERINE.—An Algerine is a native of Algiers, French province, north of Africa.

BUTTERCUP.—A marriage license is available for three months after the date of its being granted.

MYLE.—Inquire at shops where they are sold, and also look in the London Directory.

COLLECTOR.—The stamp has a fair value, but we cannot recommend any collector.

LOVER OF DOGS.—Shepherd dogs and dogs under six months old are exempted from the tax.

UNEMPLOYED.—The occupation you mention is not to be commended.

ARGUMENT.—Mormonshire is an English county; it formerly was a portion of the Principality of Wales.

YANKEE DOODLE.—They look very pretty when served on a small dish garnished with glossy leaves and small red peppers.

TRIOUBLED SISTER.—If mistresses are expected to be kind and just, servants should be respectful, obedient, cleanly and industrious.

IN SEARCH OF WORK.—You might be fortunate enough to find one willing to take you without a premium, but we doubt it.

POON JOE.—The natural food of the horse is grass; there is nothing else upon which he will grow so large, keep so healthy, or live so long.

TAFFY.—If you are of the required height and weight no objection would be taken to a deficiency of half inch in chest measurement.

ELVIRA.—We think you will require to send your blouse to get cleaned; we could not tell you of anything certain to take out such marks as you describe.

HEAVY.—Exercise of any kind will help to lessen your weight. The daily use of dumb-bells, Indian clubs, &c., will all aid in achieving your purpose.

WHEN GREEN GROWS THE GRASS.

THERE'S a spot where the sunshine loves longest to linger.

Where the grass grows the greenest and fair are the flowers.

Where perched in some tall tree, the South's grey-robed singer

Makes mellow with music the long summer hours.

Here, rippling away, to itself murmurs ever,

"Neath wide-spreading boughs on its way to the sea, O'er bright sands and pebbles, a clear little river—

'Tis the spot in all memory dearest to me!

There in childhood I wandered and gazed on the glory That gleamed in the water and crimsoned the west;

Watched the gay-dowered vine wreath the oak, grand hoary,

Nor dreamed of life's conflicts, its doubts and unrest.

Loved haunt of my youth time, methought by thy flow,

Again all thy beauties were beck'ning to me;

But alas! I was dreaming! I have left thee for ever,

The spot in all memory the dearest to me!

MOTHER OF THREE.—Very hot baths are among the most beneficial of medical agents. They will often cure colds and sore throat within twenty-four hours, if properly taken.

IN DEEP TROUBLE.—The best way to get about such work is to go to the vicar of the church of which you are a member, and tell him what you would like to do.

TOMMIE TUCKER.—Add one ounce of powdered charcoal to one quart of lemon juice; let it stand for twelve hours, then strain through muslin (fine). It is said to keep several years if kept well corked in a cool cellar. The mudlugs will fall to the bottom.

CITIZEN.—When a man is sent to prison for embezzlement, that is in satisfaction of his crime against the state or community; it does not, however, extinguish the right of the individual from whom he embezzled the money to sue and get decree against him for the amount after he comes out of prison.

GERTRUDE.—The following is highly commended. Take equal parts of ox gall, powdered soap and pipe clay and add a little turpentine. Apply a coating to the marble, and when thoroughly dry rub it off and wash with warm soft water. This will cleanse without destroying the polish. If the marble is badly stained a second application may be necessary.

CATERER.—Peel large, fresh mushrooms, sprinkle them with salt and pepper, and put them in a saucepan with a little water. For each quart of mushrooms add a tablespoonful of butter, and let them simmer for ten minutes. Pour in a pint of cream in which has been mixed a tablespoonful of cornstarch, stir two or three minutes and serve.

IN NEED OF ADVICE.—If we have any real affection at all, it cannot be better bestowed than upon a near and dear relative, who has ever been kind to us, and manifested his interest in our welfare from our youth upward. Whatever you do in the way of duty, do it with your whole heart. It will compensate you in the matter referred to as no other exercise of benevolence can.

WEATHER PROPHET.—The state of the weather can be foretold by putting a leech in a glass half filled with water, the leech being prevented by a piece of muslin fastened over the top, after the fashion of the cover of a pot of jam. If fine weather is to be expected, the occupant of the glass lies at the bottom of the water motionless and curled in a spiral form. If rain is at hand, it will creep to the top of the glass, and remain there until the weather is settled.

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NOTICE.—Part 428, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LXVII, bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

THE INDEX to Vol. LXVII is Now Ready; Price One Penny, post-free, Three-halfpence.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 26, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

WE cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

NO GOLD IN THE BAG.

"MY DEAR," said a rich but miserly old man to his niece who had nursed him through a long illness, now approaching a fatal ending, "when I am gone take the key from under my pillow, unlock the oak chest in the back room, and take from it a canvas bag you will find there. That bag, with its contents, is yours."

The day after his death she opened the chest. In a far corner was a small canvas bag marked "£200." Hastily and delightedly undoing the string, sure of a heap of sovereigns, the girl found the bag filled with scraps of silver and copper. On the top was a bit of paper with the following, in the old wretch's handwriting, scrawled on it, "*Never count your chickens before they are hatched. An expected inheritance is always uncertain.*" What shall we say of such a man? His niece, good girl though she was, expressed her own opinion of him in language we may pardon but need not repeat.

Be good enough to read the two subjoined letters (both short), and see if you can trace any likeness between the group of three cases:—

"Nearly all my life," so runs the first one, "I have suffered from illness. My appetite was poor, and after meals I had so much pain that at length I became almost afraid to eat. There was a strange gnawing sensation at the pit of my stomach, and an all-gone sinking feeling, which was frightful. My heart used to thump so I could scarcely bear it, and it kept me from getting my proper sleep at night. I became extremely nervous and weak, and from time to time I was confined to my bed. Year after year I lingered along in this way; life being no benefit or blessing to me. The doctors could not help me, and I thought I was in a consumption. In May, 1890, I first heard of, and used, Mother Seigel's Syrup. I bought it of Mr. Walton, the chemist, in Bilston Street. After taking it a short time I was much better. I was able to eat, digest, and sleep. I continued to take it, and by degrees I got entirely well. I have no more pain, and keep in good health. Now, almost for the first time, life is an enjoyment and an advantage to me, and I owe it to Mother Seigel's Syrup. (Signed) (Mrs.) Louise Aston, All Saints Road, Wolverhampton, September 24th, 1895."

"In the spring of 1880," says the second letter, "I began to feel low, weak and weary, with no

heart either for work or pleasure. My skin was sallow, and I had great pain around my sides, with a horrible feeling of sinking and mental depression. I ate but little, and food caused me much pain at the chest and between the shoulders. I could obtain nothing to relieve the distress at my stomach. With the least exertion or excitement my heart palpitated violently. I became a misery and a burden to my friends and to myself. In spite of all the doctors could do I continued in this way for seven years. In the early part of 1887 I read about the cures effected by Mother Seigel's Syrup, and my next door neighbour also recommended it. I got a bottle from Messrs. Bunch & Co., chemists, Sand Pits, and in a short time it relieved me. My appetite came back; I ate and gained strength. Why, it seemed like beginning a new life, like getting an inheritance that I had come near being cheated out of. I kept on using the Syrup, and in a few weeks all the low feeling and general wretchedness had left me—I hope never to return. I have told many persons about your wonderful medicine, and consent to your publishing this hurried and imperfect account of my case. (Signed) (Mrs.) Ann Oldacre, 2, Highfield Place, Rosalie Street, Brookfields, Birmingham, Sept. 20th, 1895."

Now please take notice. Every human being born into the world has a right (*at the start*) to health, liberty and a chance for the future. But do they all get it? No, not by countless millions. Through somebody's fault they are cheated out of their rightful patrimony; their bag contains base metal instead of gold. Yes, and worse; it sometimes contains poisons—that is, seeds of disease, which often develop afterwards into pain and death. The young girl's coppers could never be turned into gold, alas for her! But, as in the instances set forth in the above letters, disease and pain can be driven away and health established in their place. Part of the inheritance at least can be restored to its owners. You now see the likeness I spoke of. As for the ailment from which these two ladies suffered, it was disordered digestion, chronic dyspepsia, with the train of evils that go with it. And for the cure of this prevailing disease Mother Seigel's Syrup is worth more than the young girl's canvas bag would have been had its contents consisted of shining gold coin.



FOR COUGHS, COLDS, ASTHMA, BRONCHITIS.

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Royal Irish Fusiliers, Cork,

Feb. 6th, 1896.

DEAR SIR,—I wish to give public testimony to the infinite value which your remedy for Dysentery and Diarrhoea (Dr. BROWNE'S **CHLORODYNE**) proved to several members of the Special Service Corps, in the recent Ashanti-Expedition. I bought a small bottle just before leaving London for West Africa, and having used it myself with beneficial result, treated some of my comrades with equal success (though some of them were very bad). I should be very glad to recommend it to anyone about to travel in a treacherous climate, where they are so much exposed to this dangerous malady.

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DANGER

are synonymous, but neither exists where Lifebuoy Soap is freely used. Eminent Medical Men, Officers of Health and Trained Nurses recommend this Soap for use during Epidemics.

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Sold everywhere, in Boxes, 9d., 1s. 1d., and 2s. 9d. each, with Full directions.

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THE LONDON READER

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PART 430. VOL. LXVIII.—APRIL, 1897.

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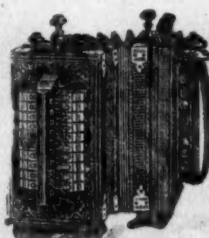
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